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**A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION INTO THE
EXPERIENCES OF RETRENCHMENT SURVIVORS:
A CASE STUDY OF EMPLOYEES AT A SOUTH-
AFRICAN ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE COMPANY**

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ABSTRACT

Retrenchments have become increasingly prevalent in South Africa affecting those that are retrenched and the survivors of such a process. Despite survivors being the linchpins of future profitability, research on their experiences is limited in this country. This research followed a case study approach and examined survivor experiences in a South African alcoholic beverage organisation. Qualitative data was obtained through fourteen semi-structured interviews with employees who are retrenchment survivors. Following thematic analysis, three key themes emerged: survivor responses throughout the retrenchment process, survivor work attitudes and behaviours throughout the retrenchment process and survivor perceptions on the management of the process. Results indicate that while some survivors adjusted to their survivor status, others experienced difficulty coping with this process and correspondingly showed signs of survivor syndrome. South African specific issues pertaining to the pace of transformation and implementation of affirmative action policy added new insights into survivor experiences in this country. The results are interpreted and discussed in light of existing research and literature in the field.

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INTRODUCTION

This research is an exploratory case study, which investigates the experiences of those employees whom have survived the threat of retrenchments by being chosen to remain with the organisation, namely, the survivors of a retrenchment. Attention is focussed on their overall experiences and responses as survivors and the impact of this on their attitudes and behaviours at work. This study therefore employs a qualitative investigation that attempts to uncover a rich and holistic understanding of the life-world of survivors in the aftermath of a retrenchment drive.

This document is structured according to six sections each constituting a chapter. The first chapter offers a review of salient literature and research pertaining to the experiences of survivors following retrenchment initiatives as well as literature relating to the management of negative survivor responses, namely survivor syndrome within the context of the workplace.

The second chapter describes the broad social context within which this study is located as well as a background to the case being researched. A description of the broad social context relates to the reality of downsizing and retrenchments in South Africa in light of various social, political and economic forces that influence this practice. The prevalence of retrenchments is then discussed in relation to the impact of survivors in the country.

The third chapter details the exploratory case study located within a qualitative research framework with which this study is approached. This includes a description of the philosophy underpinning the study and reasons why such a methodology is congruent with the objectives of this research. Issues pertaining to the quality of the research are also included, namely that of validity, reliability and generalisability of research.

The fourth chapter presents the results or findings that emerged from the study. This is described both through a graphical representation of findings as well as a detailed description of each theme and sub-theme emanating from the individual interviews.

Chapter five offers a critical analysis, interpretation and discussion of the findings emerging from this study in light of prior research and literature in the field.

The final chapter describes the limitations posed by the current study, recommendations for the management of survivors as well as offers recommendations for future research in the field, particularly in the context of South Africa. It is hoped that these recommendations may serve to equip organisations with the insight for managing survivors in the aftermath of retrenchments.

The following chapter offers a review of literature and research in the field.

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CHAPTER ONE – LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a review of literature and research pertaining to the experience of retrenchment survivors and sets the theoretical context within which the present study is located.

This chapter constitutes four sections. The first section describes theories of survivor responses and the impact of this on work attitudes and behaviours in the context of downsizing. A comparison of theories of survivor responses is also included. The second section details three key influencing factors in the experience of survivor syndrome, namely, the change in psychological contract, the perceived fairness of the retrenchment process and personality differences as well as psychological adaptation of survivors. Section three reviews the factors involved in the management of survivors prior to, during, and following a retrenchment process. A summary of the chapter is offered in section four.

Survivor Responses and their Impact on the Workplace in the Context of Downsizing

Within the vast area of organisational change, the focus of downsizing, and retrenchment as an effect of downsizing, has drawn much attention in the last decade (Thornhill & Saunders, 1998; Kinnie, Hutchinson, & Purcell, 1998; Appelbaum, Leblanc & Shapiro, 1998; Baruch & Hind, 1999; Appelbaum & Donia, 2000). This follows from a need by theorists to bring to awareness various concerns experienced by organisations whom have gone through the process of downsizing, with a focus on the management of these concerns (Brockner, 1992; Thornhill & Gibbons, 1995; Appelbaum & Donia, 2000, 2001).

Despite retrenchment being the effect of downsizing, these terms are often used interchangeably (Sadri, 1996; Baruch & Hind, 2000; Appelbaum & Donia, 2000). Other synonyms for downsizing include redundancy, de-recruiting, rightsizing, re-sizing, lay-offs, re-engineering and de-massing (Thornhill & Saunders, 1998; Kinnie et al., 1998). While each term may have its own connotation, they do denote to some extent a common meaning which is suggestive of a deliberate decision for the systematic reduction of a workforce through an intentionally instituted set of activities in order to improve efficiency and performance (ibid.). This includes reductions in the form of transfers, voluntary retrenchments, outplacements with or without compulsory retrenchments, layoffs, attrition, induced redeployment, involuntary redeployment and early retirement (Thornhill & Saunders, 1998; Kinnie et al., 1998; Appelbaum, Close & Klasa, 1999).

Survivor Responses as a source of Failed Retrenchment Initiatives

The driving force behind the decision to downsize is the expected economic and organisational benefits of improved productivity, efficiency, competitive advantage and the intentional reduction of costs (Kinnie et al., 1998). While some organisations do in fact achieve these objectives, most organisations fail to do so (Cascio, 1993; Cameron, 1994; Freeman, 1994; Appelbaum et al, 1998; Kinnie et al., 1998). Research in the field includes survey results from the Society for Human Resource Management in America, where over 50% of the 1, 468 organisations researched, indicated a drop in productivity in the aftermath of downsizing (Cascio, 1993).

Research on retrenchments further suggest that while the majority of organisations fail to meet the objectives of increased profitability and competitiveness, those that do, encounter problems as regards the sustainability of such objectives (Kinnie et al., 1998; Appelbaum et al., 1999). In light of this, those firms that experience an improved productivity do so only as an initial short-lived improvement which is followed by a long-term depressed and dismal deterioration in productivity (Cascio, 1993; Appelbaum et al., 1999).

Literature in the field of downsizing identifies the impact on individuals to be one of the most powerful factors that determines the success or failure of a retrenchment initiative (Sadri, 1996; Kaye, 1998; Kinnie et al., 1998; Thornhill & Saunders, 1998; Appelbaum et al., 1999; Appelbaum & Donia, 2000). The impact of retrenchment initiatives on the survivors, namely, those individuals that have been chosen to remain with the organisation following retrenchments, is a key determinant in this regard (ibid.). For a full definition of a survivor, refer to Thornhill & Saunders (1998). This follows from the idea that it is the survivors who are the linchpins of future profitability (Moskal, 1992; as cited in Appelbaum et al., 1999). As such, understanding the impact of downsizing on them is crucial insofar as meeting the bottom line outcomes of the downsizing initiative (ibid.).

In view of the relation between survivor responses at work and the success or failure of retrenchment initiatives, a growing interest developed amongst theorists insofar as understanding the nature of survivor responses (Thornhill & Saunders, 1998). What follows is a description of such theories. The terms 'survivor' and 'victim' are used widely by the following two theories and need to be understood in view of the literature on retrenchments.

Theories of Survivor Responses

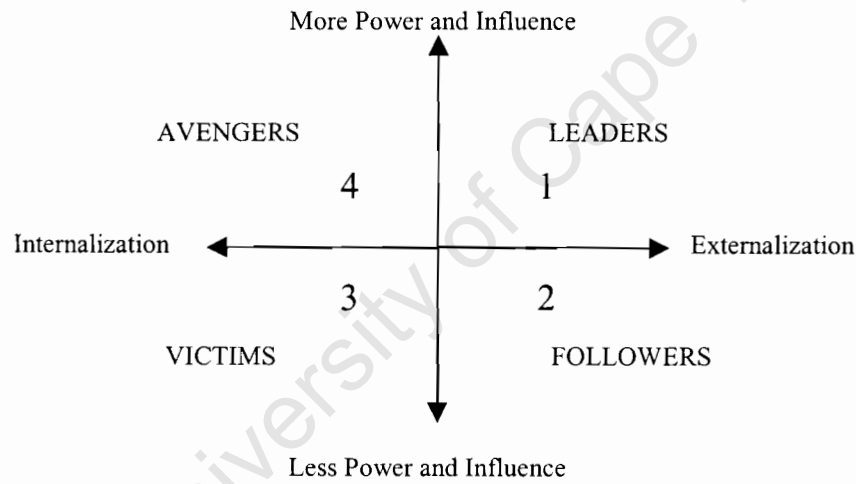
Two key theories regarding the range of survivor responses that individuals may display following retrenchments are reviewed below, namely, Alevras & Frigeri (as cited in Appelbaum et al., 1999) theory, known as the chain reaction model and Kaye’s (1998) theory on survivor responses. Factors of commonality are noted by both theorists as are the features of difference.

Alevras and Frigeri

Alevras & Frigeri (as cited in Appelbaum et al., 1999), by means of their Chain Reaction model factor in different aspects that influence survivor responses. Four types of survivor responses are outlined by the following model and are positioned along both a horizontal and vertical axis, representing factors that influence the positioning of each response (see figure 1.).

According to Alevras & Frigeri (as cited in Appelbaum et al, 1999), the horizontal axis of this model represents a survivor’s area of mental concentration. The one end of the axis represents reactions where the survivor is overwhelmed by self-concerns and the other end where the survivor is more accepting of the layoff while displaying more concern for the distressed organisation.

Figure 1: The Chain Reaction Model



The vertical axis represents survivor’s perceptions of power and influence in the organisation, following retrenchments. At the lower end are survivors who experience a decline in power, influence and control over their careers and within the organisation itself, while on the upper end are survivors

who perceive the opposite as where the layoff is seen as an opportunity to improve their position in the organisation.

The Leaders in quadrant one depict reactions where the survivor assumes the role of a leader whose primary concern is for the distressed organisation and leading others in the direction they think it is headed (Alevras & Frigeri, as cited in Appelbaum et al., 1999). This role demands accurate judgement as leaders may influence the rest of the organisation in the wrong direction. A second characteristic of leaders is that, instead of getting stuck in a rut of self-concerns, they perceive the layoff more positively and view it as an opportunity to increase their levels of power and influence in the organisation.

The second quadrant depicts survivors whom are referred to as followers (Alevras & Frigeri, as cited in Appelbaum et al., 1999). Survivors who fall in this category perceive or experience that they have less power and influence in the organisation in the aftermath of a layoff, however believe the necessity of these initiatives for the organisation they perceive is having been problem-laden. They adopt a follow the leader mindset and expect that their loyalty to the organisation will provide them with benefits at a later point. They, therefore refrain from withdrawing into a mindset of negative self-concerns.

Victims are the term used for survivors who fall in the third quadrant (Alevras & Frigeri, as cited in Appelbaum et al., 1999). A key feature of survivors who belong to this category is their overwhelming focus on self-concerns as opposed to concern for the organisation. These survivors withdraw into feelings of anger and self-pity, passivity, powerlessness and risk aversion due to a debilitating fear that they will be next in line to lose their jobs. They, therefore, do not support the layoff decision and believe that it was wrong.

Alevras & Frigeri (as cited in Appelbaum et al., 1999) describe avengers as the final type of survivor reaction, one that is positioned in the fourth quadrant. While this group of survivors are encompassed by self-concerns, the nature of such concerns differs to that experienced by the previous group, i.e. they have a primary focus on self-benefits. As such, this group does not care why the layoff happen, rather they are concerned more with the various gaps and chaos created by the layoff and how they can use this initiative as an opportunity to get ahead and re-build themselves.

Kaye (1998) discusses two types of survivor responses that differ markedly to that expected by organisations. The first of these relates to healthy adaptation following retrenchments and is described as being displayed by a survivor who is “Staying On But Building Options – (SOBBOs)” (Kaye, 1998, p.1). Kaye (1998) describes SOBBOs as survivors who are successful in getting ahead and moving past the trauma and difficulty that exist after a layoff. These survivors are aware of the changing nature of the workplace in contemporary times and the impact this may have on traditional employee-employer relationships and, therefore, shape their expectations during layoffs accordingly.

Many theorists liken the experiences of survivors after a layoff to those experienced by individuals who are mourning the loss of a loved one (Kaye, 1998; Appelbaum et al., 1998; Doherty, Bank, & Vinnicombe, 1996; Ketzs de Vries & Balazs, 1997). As such, Kaye (1998) describes SOBBOs as experiencing stages of mourning following a layoff, where this process is marked by both short and long term coping mechanisms. Some of the short term concerns that SOBBOs may experience after a layoff include an increase in workload, reduced benefits; fewer opportunities for mobility, greater organisational uncertainty and less career-orientated training and development (Kaye, 1998).

While it seems that SOBBOs experience short-term concerns in the first two stages of mourning marked by denial, then resistance where they experience fear, unfairness and anger, they have the ability to rapidly shift from this negative mindset. This ushers SOBBOs into a long term coping strategy which is marked by the next stage of mourning, i.e. exploration where they recognize the change as not just bringing in danger, but opportunity as well. Kaye (1998) indicates that SOBBOs successfully complete the mourning cycle by reaching a stage of commitment where they are in a position to assume responsibility for achieving the results they want and are able to reflect on what they have learnt.

A second type of survivor reaction relates to stunted adaptation and differs markedly to that experienced by SOBBOs. Kaye (1998) refers to survivors who fall in this category as “Hanging On But Bummed Out” - “Hanging On” because they feel lucky to still have a job and “Bummed Out” because they see a future of limited career vigor and personal empowerment (HOBBOs)” (p. 1). These survivors function less effectively than do SOBBOs as they appear to be stuck in a negative mindset where they experience survivor guilt, low morale and fatigue from extra workloads and feel mistreated and trapped in their jobs. Unlike SOBBOs who prepare themselves for the changing nature

of the workplace, HOBBOs don't and thus expect lifelong employment leading to their devastation when layoffs are announced and the experience of sadness, anger, mistrust and psychological uncoupling from the organisation (Kaye, 1998).

Like SOBBOs, they also experience the mourning cycle and the same short-term concerns as mentioned above. They, however, differ drastically in relation to their long-term coping mechanisms. While SOBBOs seem to experience all four stages of the mourning cycle, HOBBOs don't and often get stuck in either the first stage of denial where they ignore the implications ahead, or the second stage of resistance where they become helpless, powerless and confused about the future (Kaye, 1998).

A Comparison of Both Theories

In comparison to the chain reaction model, Kaye's (1998) theory may appear reductionistic or an oversimplification of the complexity inherent in the aforementioned survivor reactions. Apart from certain personality differences (to be discussed later), Kaye (1998) refrains from discussing the multi-play of such factors that may have promoted or thwarted a SOBBO or HOBBO survivor reaction leading one to believe the non-existence of survivor reactions that deflect from the aforementioned two.

While it can be observed that Kaye's (1998) idea of the SOBBO reaction may fall between the leader, follower or avenger in the chain reaction model; Kaye's (1998) notion of a HOBBO survivor reaction and that of the victim survivor reaction in the other model, shares a strong commonality.

Correspondingly, most of the literature on survivor experiences in business reveals a concentration on this commonality, namely, a negative survivor response (Sadri, 1996; Appelbaum, Delage, Labib & Gault, 1997; Appelbaum et al., 1998; Thornhill & Saunders, 1998; Appelbaum et al., 1999; Baruch & Hind, 2000). With this focus in mind, the following sections will be devoted to a more detailed discussion of this particular type of survivor reaction and its impact on organisational dimensions.

Survivor Syndrome

The term "survivor syndrome" has been used to describe a set of shared reactions and behaviours of people who have survived an adverse event specifically in the context of those surviving the holocaust (Doherty et al., 1996; Baruch & Hind, 2000). This term has been borrowed, introduced and applied to the area of business and management studies by Brockner in the early eighties and used to describe

survivor reactions that resemble those described above as the HOBBO or victim type of response (Baruch & Hind, 2000). According to Appelbaum et al. (1997), survivor syndrome is a term used to depict a psycho-social syndrome that involves a mixed bag of behaviours and emotions often exhibited by remaining employees following retrenchment initiatives.

Research on survivor syndrome has highlighted a list of key emotions and feelings that survivors experience when they endure a downsizing initiative (Brockner, Davy, & Carter, 1985; Caudron, 1996; Appelbaum et al., 1997; Butts, 1997; Appelbaum et al., 1998; Appelbaum et al., 1999; Appelbaum & Donia, 2000; Baruch & Hind, 2000). A key finding of various laboratory studies conducted on retrenchment survivors showed that they experience survivor guilt, namely, they feel guilty because their co-workers have lost their jobs while they are still employed (Brockner et al., 1985; Brockner, Greenberg, Brockner, Bortz, Davy, & Carter, 1986). Other studies replicated this finding and further established that survivors were more likely to experience guilt when they were close to the laid off employee (Brockner et al., 1985; Noer, 1993; Sadri, 1996; Caudron, 1996; Appelbaum et al. 1998; Thornhill & Saunders, 1998).

Aside from guilt, survivors were also found to experience a deep sense of loss and remorse which set them experiencing the mourning cycle, namely, loss of their co-workers, loss of what life was before the downsizing (Kets de Vries & Balazs, 1997; Kaye, 1998; Thornhill & Saunders, 1998; Appelbaum et al., 1998). This sense of loss is often coupled by anger, bitterness and resentment towards the organisation for psychologically uncoupling them from their zones of comfort and plunging them into change. These feelings are exacerbated should survivors feel that their co-workers have been treated unfairly and the rules have changed on them (Noer, 1993; Doherty et al., 1996; Appelbaum et al., 1997; Thornhill & Saunders, 1998; Appelbaum et al., 1998; Baruch & Hind, 1999; Appelbaum & Donia, 2000).

Such emotions are usually coupled with uncertainty, anxiety and fear that they would be next in line to be retrenched should future retrenchments take place (Noer, 1993; Sadri, 1996; Appelbaum et al., 1997; Appelbaum et al., 1998; Thornhill & Saunders, 1998; Appelbaum et al., 1999; Appelbaum & Donia, 2000). Such emotions often lead survivors to feel distrustful toward management, an emotion that seriously undermines effective and strong relationships in the workplace (ibid.).

While the experience of negative reactions may affect the survivor on a personal level, such reactions have equally detrimental effects on their work attitudes and behaviours. It is to this effect that the next section turns.

Survivor Work Attitudes and Behaviours

The tendency for negative emotional states to impact directly on work attitudes and behaviours has been a key factor in the experience of survivor syndrome (Brockner & Kim, 1993; Thornhill & Gibbons, 1995; Doherty et al., 1996; Sadri, 1996; Appelbaum et al., 1997; Thornhill & Saunders, 1998; Appelbaum & Donia, 2000; Baruch & Hind, 2000). The following section describes the negative work attitudes that survivors may experience and the behavioural reactions that follow from these attitudes during and after the downsizing operation.

Survivors have been found to experience work attitudes that reflect an increase in work stress and job insecurity, a decrease in job satisfaction, morale and motivation, organisational commitment, loyalty, trust and faith towards the organisation in general (ibid.). Such attitudes have influenced the promotion of certain work behaviours such as a strong desire and intention to leave the organisation, namely, absenteeism, reduced risk-taking and work performance or effort and resistance to change (Thornhill & Saunders, 1998; Appelbaum & Donia, 2000).

Job Insecurity

Of the various work attitudes that survivors may display, job insecurity appears to be a key attitude that may influence the onset of other negative work attitudes (Brockner, 1992; Sadri, 1996; Appelbaum et al., 1997; Appelbaum et al., 1999; Appelbaum & Donia, 2000; Wiesenfeld, Brockner, Petzall, Wolf, & Bailey, 2001). Job insecurity in its broad sense refers to the uncertainty employees' experience about attributes such as career progression, contractual relationships including the psychological contract (Thornhill & Saunders, 1998).

According to Appelbaum et al. (1997) during times of job insecurity employees with few job alternatives tend to withdraw psychologically resulting in reduced organisational commitment, job satisfaction, job performance and loyalty to the firm as well as an increase in the intent to quit.

Sadri (1996) notes a potential effect of increased job insecurity in the workplace, namely, that of decreased work effort in relation to organisational roles and duties. According to Sadri (1996), work

effort depends on survivors experience of job insecurity dependent on two factors, namely, perceived threat and perceived control. The former refers to survivor's perception of the likelihood of further layoffs and possible job loss while the latter refers to the survivor's belief that they or their employer can take some action to assist them in neutralizing the negative effects of a job loss should it occur (ibid.). Brockner's (1992) research on survivors reinforces this concept since it was found that the threat of additional layoffs itself did not lead to job insecurity. Rather, insecurity was experienced when survivors also believed that if additional layoffs were to occur, there would be little they could do to counteract the negative effects of it (ibid.).

While Sadri's (1996) research has revealed a potential link between the experience of high levels of job insecurity and reduced work effort and productivity as dependent on perceived threat and control, Brockner (1992) identified a second relationship. It was found that where survivors experienced perceived threat of future retrenchments and perceived loss of control, their levels of productivity increased at moderate rather than low or high levels of job insecurity (Brockner, 1992).

Relating to its impact on productivity levels, Wiesenfeld et al. (2001) identified job insecurity as a tile stressor that can seriously threaten survivors' self-esteem whilst further affecting employees' productivity levels. Similar findings suggested that in response to the perceived threat of further layoffs, worry and hence work motivation as well as productivity levels was increased with survivors that were low in trait self-esteem rather than those with medium to high levels of trait-self esteem (Brockner, Grover, O'Malley, Reed, & Glynn, 1993).

Job insecurity may affect organisational effectiveness since the decision to downsize forces managers to adjust their decision-making style to the urgency of what they perceive as threatening, thus increasing the tendency for further downsizing operations (Appelbaum et al., 1999). Organisational effectiveness is found to be indirectly affected when actual job insecurity and anger felt by survivors often leads to decreased levels of staff loyalty (Appelbaum et al., 1999). Similarly the influence of negative responses on survivors' job involvement and organisational commitment has been of interest since such influencing factors may seriously impede the productivity and effectiveness of the company (Brockner et al., 1986; Mellor, 1992; Brockner et al., 1993).

Organisational Commitment

In their study on the predictors of survivors' job involvement and commitment, Brockner et al. (1986) hypothesized that survivors with a strong work ethic would be more involved with their jobs than would those who had a weaker work ethic. Work ethic was operationally defined as an employee's individualism, industriousness and ambition. It was also expected that workers' prior history of role ambiguity would be negatively related to their job involvement as people who had to contend with enduring stress in the workplace would be less involved with their jobs than those whose work history was not as persistently stressful. Prior role ambiguity would refer to employees' work history that may have exposed them to stress on an ongoing or regular basis.

When each of the two factors were researched in view of a mild and a severe layoff scenario, the results of the study showed that work ethic and prior role ambiguity measures predicted survivors' job involvement when layoffs were mild but not when they were severe. In sum, the study showed that with the increased stressors of a severe layoff scenario, survivors' job involvement and commitment was reduced when they had a strong work ethic and increased prior role ambiguity.

Job Satisfaction

A key research study highlighting factors that affect survivors' job satisfaction, was carried out by Brockner & Kim (1993). The research involved two studies examining the consequences of turnover by investigating the factors that affect survivors' job satisfaction in response to a co-worker who departed for a better job. Two key findings emerged. The first finding showed that when the co-worker departed for a more favourable job, then the survivors' comparative tendency was negatively related to their job satisfaction, namely, survivors' tendency to compare their jobs situation to the co-worker's new one led to a decrease in job satisfaction.

A second finding revealed that given that the co-worker departed for a better job and social comparison was likely, the co-worker's social comparison relevance was negatively related to the survivors job satisfaction. As such, the more likely the co-worker was a target for social comparison (personal or professional similarity), the more relevant he or she was for social comparison, which threatened the survivor's job satisfaction. The final finding showed that survivors with low trait self-esteem experienced a greater threat to their self-esteem by the co-workers departure for a better job thus manifesting in lower levels of job satisfaction.

In order to understand how survivor responses and their impact on work attitudes and behaviours are set in motion, it is necessary to examine three key factors that may influence such responses, attitudes and behaviours. It is to these factors that the next section shifts.

Key Factors that influence Survivor Responses, Attitudes and Behaviours

The Expectation of Lifelong Employment

A key factor that influences the experience of survivor syndrome is the expectation that lifelong employment with any company is a given that will never change and is therefore never questioned by survivors (Noer, 1993; Waterman, Waterman, & Collard, 1994; Doherty, 1996; Appelbaum et al., 1997; Kaye, 1998; Baruch & Hind, 2000). This expectation is borne out of the implicit, unspoken and unwritten psychological contract that survivors enter into with their employers at the onset, one that heavily influences how they view their current and future reality with the company (ibid.). The concept of the psychological contract refers to the unspoken promise, not present in the small print of the employment contract, of what the employer gives, and what employees give in return (Baruch & Hind, 1999).

A focus on the traditional psychological contract prior to the eighties meant that an employer would offer an employee, employment security, training and promotions in exchange for the employee's loyalty, trust and commitment to the company (Kets de Vries & Balazs, 1997; Thornhill & Saunders, 1998; Baruch & Hind, 1999, 2000). This contract was often described as a paternalistic one in which the organisation (parent) and the employee (child) were dependent on each other, namely, a concept referred to as organisational codependency (Noer, 1993; Waterman et al., 1994; Hiltrop, 1995; Appelbaum et al., 1997).

While the eighties onwards witnessed the advent of rapid and constant change in view of the less robust economic milieu, downsizing became an attractive means for cost containment (Waterman et al., 1994; Hiltrop, 1995; Kaye, 1998; Baruch & Hind, 1999, 2000). It therefore became increasingly evident that a revision of the traditional psychological contract was needed in order to adapt and keep up the changing landscape (ibid.).

The new psychological contract is therefore one where employers give individuals the opportunity to develop greatly enhanced employability in exchange for better productivity and some degree of

commitment to the company purpose and community for as long as the employee works there (Waterman et al., 1994). The focus had therefore shifted from lifelong employment to employability which focuses on employees building a portable skills portfolio where such skill variation could be transferable amongst and within various organisational settings (Waterman et al., 1994; Hiltrop, 1995; Thornhill & Saunders, 1998; Appelbaum et al., 1999; Baruch & Hind, 2000). Waterman et al. (1994) further describe this contract as a more adult one in comparison to the parent-child relationship characteristic of the former psychological contract.

Hiltrop (1995) suggests that while companies may have foreseen the need for a change in the traditional psychological contract in view of the vast economic changes, the employees were less aware of the gravity and implications of such change. Since employees may not have made such inferences, the nature of the contract remained psychological and, therefore, implicit, unspoken and unwritten further promoting the milieu of normality (Doherty, 1996; Kets de Vries & Balazs, 1997; Thornhill & Saunders, 1998; Appelbaum et al., 1999; Baruch & Hind, 1999). As such, when layoffs occurred, survivors were unprepared for this change and more specifically how such change may affect them personally and organisationally (ibid.).

A common finding is that survivors' expectation of lifelong employment and their disappointment when this expectation was not met led them to feel that their traditional psychological contract with the organisation had been broken (Kets de Vries & Balazs, 1997; Thornhill & Saunders, 1998; Appelbaum et al., 1997; Baruch & Hind, 1999). It is the disappointment, betrayal and distrust experienced in view of this that is considered as a key influencing factor in the experience of survivor syndrome (Noer, 1993; Kets de Vries & Balazs, 1997; Kaye, 1998; Thornhill & Saunders, 1998; Baruch & Hind, 1999; Paige, 2001).

Noer (1993) questions the tendency for organisations to behave like families where the parent-child relationship is implicated. He suggests that adaptation to the new psychological contract should demand a shift away from family-like organisations to those with a greater focus on self-reliance (Noer, 1993). Waterman et al. (1994) reiterate the importance of this conceptual transition as the traditional parent-child relationship must give way to an adult-adult relationship.

In sum, the aforementioned suggests the importance for organisations' to raise survivors' awareness to the changing psychological contract as a measure to manage or prevent the experience of survivor

syndrome (Noer, 1993; Doherty, 1996; Appelbaum et al., 1997; Appelbaum et al., 1999; Baruch & Hind, 1999, 2000; Paige, 2001).

A second influencing factor that is likely to promote the experience of survivor syndrome is the survivor perceptions of the fairness and justice with which the retrenchment process was managed by the organisation.

The Perceived Fairness of the Retrenchment Process

The perceived fairness of the retrenchment initiative is a pivotal factor that informs the experience of survivor syndrome (Brockner et al., 1986; Labib & Appelbaum, 1994; Brockner, Wiesenfeld & Martin, 1995; Sadri, 1996; Applebaum et al., 1997; Appelbaum et al., 1998; Thornhill & Saunders, 1998; Appelbaum et al., 1999; Appelbaum & Donia, 2000). Research evaluating the effects of employee perceptions about the fairness of the retrenchment process, have used equity theory to inform an understanding (Brockner et al., 1986; Appelbaum et al., 1997; Adams, 1965, as cited in Thornhill & Saunders, 1998; Appelbaum & Donia, 2001).

According to Adams (cited in Appelbaum & Donia, 2001), equity theory posits that individuals have a tendency to compare their inputs and outputs to those of others and respond in a way that eliminates these inequalities. Though survivors continue to receive their rewards, namely, being employed in the organisation, they compare these to those of terminated employees, who are now out of a job, and relate this back to them (ibid.). Brockner et al. (1986) indicate that perceptions of fairness constitute two qualities, i.e., positive and negative inequity where the experience of each of these concepts motivates survivors to react in different ways. It is through these two types of inequity that survivors experience the negative reactions characteristic of survivor syndrome following retrenchments (Appelbaum & Donia, 2001).

Positive inequity refers to workers' perceiving that the ratio between outcome and input is higher for them than it is for relevant others (Brockner et al., 1986). Two basic notions in equity theory are that positive inequity (1) arouses guilt, and (2) motivates individuals to redress this guilt through behavioural or psychological means (ibid.). Positive inequity may cause employees to work harder, presumably in order to redress the perception that they are taking advantage of their employees (ibid.). Negative inequity on the other hand, implies that survivors may identify so closely with those made

redundant that it may lead to reduced organisational commitment and survivors working less harder (Brockner et al., 1985; 1986).

Organisational justice theory has further developed an understanding of perceived fairness and equity through the three types of justice concepts, namely, distributive justice, procedural justice and interactional justice (Brockner et al., 1985; Greenberg, 1990; Thornhill & Saunders, 1998; Appelbaum & Donia, 2001). According to Greenberg (1990), distributive justice refers to employee perceptions of outcome fairness. By applying distributive justice theory to inform the survivor reactions of a layoff, Brockner (1992) found that survivors are likely to perceive the process as unfair when they perceive a mismatch between individual objectives or their own perceptions of the redundancy selection criteria and that of the organisation's. As such, consistency and uniformity as regards the manner in which excess positions are identified is crucial to survivors' perceptions of the process as fair and just (ibid.).

Procedural justice refers to employee perceptions of fairness regarding the procedures used to make the decisions about downsizing (Greenberg, 1990; Thornhill & Saunders, 1998; Appelbaum & Donia, 2001). According to Brockner (1992), negative survivor reactions are likely to arise when employees perceive the procedures during the downsizing as unfair. Daley & Geyer (cited in Thornhill & Saunders, 1998) suggest that research on procedural fairness have focused on two key factors, namely, that of 'voice' and 'justification'. The former refers to the process control or employee involvement in the layoff process while the latter refers to an educative process to explaining the need for retrenchments. Findings show that both factors positively affects perceptions of fairness and job satisfaction, which in turn affects survivor's level of commitment to the organisation and intention to stay (ibid.).

Finally, interactional justice refers to employee perceptions about the fairness of the interpersonal treatment, which they receive during the implementation of downsizing (Greenberg, 1990; Thornhill & Saunders, 1998; Appelbaum & Donia, 2001). In relation to the downsizing context, survivors may perceive fair and just treatment when line managers treat them and the layoff employees with respect, dignity, transparency and openness (Thornhill & Saunders, 1998).

Brockner's (1992) research study on the management of survivor syndrome raises all three concepts of justice theory when establishing that survivors look to seven key questions that inform their perceived fairness of the layoff process. These include whether the layoff was justified, whether it was consistent

with corporate culture, whether management provided ample advanced notice and explanations and whether higher managerial levels were also affected by the cutbacks. Other factors include the extent to which terminated employees were taken care of and the extent to which employees were involved in the downsizing process (ibid.).

Apart from perceived fairness, personality differences and potential for psychological adaptation are other factors found to influence survivor responses, attitudes and behaviours.

Personality Characteristics and Psychological Adaptation

Kaye's (1998) research on the different survivor responses indicates that the key reason as to why SOBBOs journeyed successfully through all stages of their mourning cycle compared to HOBBOs who got stuck in the resistance stage, lies in the different personality traits that each type exhibits. Kets de Vries & Balazs' (1997) research findings on survivor reactions are congruent with this where it was found that survivors who displayed psychological adaptation through the mourning cycle were those who had a fighting spirit driven by hope.

Those employees that got stuck in the midst of the mourning cycle were more likely to utilize defensive mechanisms to reintegrate themselves (Kets de Vries & Balazs, 1997). The use of defensive coping patterns borrow their concepts from psychodynamic theory, an offshoot of psychoanalysis where a substantial part of human motivation and action is theorized to be unconsciously driven (Carr, 2001). Psychodynamic theory documents the changes that employees experience in the aftermath of radical change, to have their roots in defenses (ibid.). In their research, Kets de Vries & Balazs (1997) found that defenses displayed throughout the downsizing process exacerbated survivor's position of being stuck during the mourning cycle since they functioned as a barrier to healthy adaptation and acceptance of the new reality.

Lazarus & Folkman (1984) define coping as the changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and internal demands that are interpreted as stressful or exceeding the resources of the person. Flach (1988) extends on this concept of coping and adaptation when he discusses the law of disruption and reintegration by stating that success implies making it, having part of it fall apart, then finding the resilience and direction to make it again. A central concept associated with this law is personality homeostasis, which involves having the ability to cope successfully by meeting life's

challenges, overcoming adversities and being able to sustain one's psychological coherence in the face of stress (ibid.).

Flach (1988) stresses that when an individual's internal and external structures disintegrate into chaos, it is at this point that they may or may not cope well and that those who choose a healthy response may be set for reintegration into a more and effective level of personal coherence. He concludes that it is resilient people who have the ability to reintegrate and put the pieces of themselves and their worlds together again to create a new homeostasis (ibid.).

Flach's (1988) concept of disruption and reintegration closely resembles Kaye's (1998) and Kets de Vries & Balazs (1997) findings as regards the personality traits that enabled certain survivors to cope more effectively than others, namely, that they were more proactive, positive in attitude and motivated by hope and a fighting spirit. This is true in so far as survivors who journey successfully through the mourning cycle are willing to go through a process of self-examination, followed by a redefinition and reinvention of themselves and their new reality (ibid.).

Developed by Kobasa in 1979, hardiness is used to describe a particular constellation of personality characteristics that help to buffer the distress-producing effects of stressful stimuli (Fine, 1991). This personality typifies the following features, namely, a belief that one can control or influence events in one's life; the ability to feel deeply involved and committed to the activities in one's life; and the anticipation of change as an exciting and positive challenge (Kobasa, 1979, as cited in Fine, 1991). In their research, Kets de Vries and Balazs (1997) found that hardy individuals were survivors who reacted in a constructive way when faced with the downsizing process since they managed the mourning process in an adaptable manner and without too many conflicts.

While the personality traits of survivors are relatively stable over time, the organisation's interaction with survivors is something that can be managed so as to prevent the experience of survivor syndrome. The next section discusses this management.

Managing Survivors in the Context of Downsizing

While few models have to date been developed for the management of survivor syndrome, there have been many prescribed best practice guidelines for such management prior, during and after the retrenchment process (Brockner, 1992; Labib & Appelbaum, 1994; Thornhill & Gibbons, 1995;

Baruch & Hind, 1999; Appelbaum & Donia, 2000, 2001). In this regard, the existence and implementation of best practice emerged as a key factor in the prevention and management of survivor syndrome by two research studies (Baruch & Hind, 1999, 2000)

A focus on management by prevention and hence early preparation for survivor issues is a second key factor for the management of survivor syndrome (Brockner, 1992; Labib & Appelbaum, 1994; Thornhill & Gibbons, 1995; Baruch & Hind, 1999; Appelbaum & Donia, 2000, 2001). An example of such a focus is noted by Appelbaum & Donia's (2001) realistic downsizing preview (RDP) survivor management model where addressing and preparing for survivor issues prior to the downsizing is a means through which survivors may be immunized against the negative outcomes of such an initiative.

The RDP ensures that employees are provided with valuable information and given a dose of organisational reality according to the changing times so that their expectations may be lowered and hence the likelihood of disappointments are lessened as a result thereof (Wanous, 1973, as cited in Appelbaum & Donia, 2001). In this regard, contemporary insights in relation to the changing psychological contract between employer and employee would be noted and factored in the RDP model for survivor management (Doherty, 1996; Baruch & Hind, 1999; Appelbaum & Donia, 2001).

The development of a trusting relationship between survivors and management prior to, during and after the downsizing process, has been noted as a third key factor in the management of survivor syndrome (Brockner, 1992; Baruch & Hind, 1999; Labib & Appelbaum, 1994; Thornhill & Gibbons, 1995; Appelbaum & Donia, 2000, 2001). Defined as an employee's willingness to be vulnerable to his or her employer based on the belief that the employer will also work toward the employee's interests, trust ushers in the development of other factors such as commitment, empowerment and respect, which buffers the uncertainty of downsizing (Appelbaum & Donia, 2001). The creation of a trusting atmosphere is facilitated by careful management of the changing psychological contract and survivor perceptions of fairness throughout the process of downsizing (Brockner et al., 1986; Sadri, 1996; Appelbaum & Donia, 2001).

The final and most crucial factor in the management of survivor syndrome and one that facilitates the creation of a trusting relationship with management is that of communication (Brockner, 1992; Thornhill & Gibbons, 1995; Caudron, 1996; Sadri, 1996; Doherty et al, 1996; Appelbaum et al, 1997; Baruch & Hind, 2000; Appelbaum & Donia, 2001). Transparent, open, honest and timely

communication functions as a social glue that binds relationships in a healthy manner whilst protecting such relationships from misunderstandings, anxiety, conflict, false information, poor productivity and the perception of inequality (ibid.). In this regard, the drive to constantly communicate information and feedback to employees is noted across every stage of survivor management, namely, prior to, during and after the downsizing process.

In view of the above four factors, the focus of attention will now turn to a review of best practice guidelines for the management of survivor syndrome, namely, survivor management prior to the downsizing process, during the downsizing process and after the downsizing process.

Survivor Management prior to the Downsizing Process

The careful management of employees prior to the retrenchment process itself, is crucial in shaping survivor perceptions of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the process at a later stage (Appelbaum & Donia, 2001). As such, managers need to assess the need for retrenchments and plan for them in a manner that does not promote negative responses when employees are notified of their survivor status.

Addressing the Possibility of Downsizing

Mishra et al. (1998, as cited in Baruch & Hind, 1999) identify the decision to downsize as a critical factor in the success of the downsizing operation. This is true insofar as such a decision should be consulted as a last resort towards cost containment in light of other cost saving options, namely, attrition, hiring or wage freezes and early retirement (Brockner, 1992; Baruch & Hind, 1999; Appelbaum et al., 1999; Appelbaum & Donia, 2000). A key feature of this long-term vision is the realistic assessment of the costs involved since it is important that the benefits outweigh the costs for the downsizing to be viable (Labib & Appelbaum, 1994; Appelbaum & Donia, 2000).

A second factor that should inform the decision to downsize is the intricate relationship between downsizing and corporate culture (Brockner, 1992; Appelbaum et al., 1998; Appelbaum et al., 1999; Appelbaum & Donia, 2000). In view of this, careful consideration needs to be vested in the alignment of the downsizing strategy operation and the culture of an organisation insofar as such alignment is perceived as congruent and therefore more likely to be experienced by the survivors as fair (Brockner, 1992). This further prevents survivors from feeling that the rules have suddenly changed on them whilst leaving them powerless and distrusting of management's ulterior motives (Brockner, 1992). Once the decision towards an impending downsizing initiative has been made and informed by various

factors, top management would have to engage in the careful planning of such an operation so as to ensure its success. This is the focus of the next section.

Planning for the Impending Downsizing Operation

The development of a long-term strategic plan is a critical success factor of any downsizing operation (Labib & Appelbaum, 1994; Thornhill & Gibbons, 1995; Doherty et al., 1996; Appelbaum et al., 1999; Appelbaum & Donia, 2001). The planning phase should therefore function as a tool through which the decision to downsize is translated into a systemic guide for action.

In view of this, top management should gather together a cross-functional team who have collectively agreed upon the reasons to downsize and collaboratively work towards identifying all affected constituents and how these can be effectively managed (Mishra et al., 1998; as cited in Appelbaum et al., 1999). Such affected constituents may include a staff analysis to determine which personnel skills are valuable to retain as well as the engagement of retraining and redeployment plans so as to prepare survivors for the consequences of the downsizing operation (Appelbaum et al., 1999).

Equally important during the planning phase is the consultation of employee assistance practitioners and other mental health experts such as outplacement counsellors to raise management's awareness in relation to the psychological impact of downsizing on the survivors and those that have been laid off (Baruch & Hind, 1999; Appelbaum & Donia, 2001). This consultation will assist management not only to hold cognizance of this area, but also to ensure that such psychological support is factored into any plan of action that is devised for survivor management.

A further area that requires careful planning is the adequate training of managers with the knowledge, information and interpersonal skills to manage employee notification, frequently asked questions and the reassurance survivors require when notification of impending layoffs occurs (Brockner, 1992; Baruch & Hind, 1999; Appelbaum et al., 1998; Appelbaum & Donia, 2001). Top management needs to plan exactly how managers are to be trained so as to develop a training package for them in conjunction with consultation from employee assistance practitioners and counselors on the interpersonal and communication skills required for their positions (Appelbaum et al., 1998).

Notifying Managers and Employees of the Impending Downsizing Initiative

The provision of ample and advanced notice of possible or impending layoffs is a pivotal step in the management of negative survivor reactions (Brockner, 1992; Thornhill & Gibbons, 1995; Baruch & Hind, 1999; Appelbaum & Donia, 2000). As such, it is suggested that top management meet with middle managers and employees to discuss the likelihood of impending layoffs in the future so as to prepare them for this (Brockner, 1992; Thornhill & Gibbons, 1995; Doherty, 1996; Appelbaum & Donia, 2001).

Benefits of early notification are that it allows terminated employees time to adjust to the changes and make short-term arrangements, providing them with the opportunity to leave with dignity, thus conveying the message to surviving employees of a caring and humane organisation (ibid.). As a result, the process becomes one where employees feel they are partners in the process rather than merely recipients of top down decision-making (Appelbaum & Donia, 2001).

The first step to communicating the impending layoffs is for top management to explicitly explain the reasons that informed the decision for a possible downsizing operation (Brockner, 1992; Zeffane & Mayo, 1994; Thornhill & Gibbons, 1995; Caudron, 1996; Appelbaum et al., 1998; Appelbaum & Donia, 2001). Such reasons should be firmly grounded within the changing psychological contract and the history of economic events, volatile markets and the influence of competition that may have prompted this decision (Brockner, 1992; Appelbaum & Donia, 2001).

Once the reasons for the possible downsizing initiative are clearly communicated to staff, top management will benefit by opening the floor for a transparent discussion where insightful ideas and suggestions are invited which might help the organisation to sidestep the downsizing altogether (Appelbaum & Donia, 2001). Appelbaum et al. (cited in Appelbaum & Donia, 2001) suggests that by seeking such input a sense of participation and belonging is fostered for those involved. Appelbaum et al. (1999) further notes that when employees were encouraged to fully participate by offering ideas, they were more likely to accept and feel responsible for the changes that might occur, thus reducing the level of uncertainty and increasing the amount of control over the process.

An additional factor that promotes the fair perception of the notification of impending layoffs is the ability for top management to communicate to employees their willingness to share in the sacrifices during the period of hardship (Brockner, 1992; Appelbaum & Donia, 2001). In view of this,

employees are more likely to believe that the impending layoffs are not just imposed on them but one that is an effect of uncontrollable circumstances where all parties are forced to seriously commit to change (Brockner, 1992). As such, their defenses and resistance in response to such notification is reduced and a more accepting stance is promoted.

Another factor that top management would need to address when notifying employees is the provision of approximate dates as to when layoffs may be expected if the final decision points in that direction (Appelbaum et al., 1999; Appelbaum & Donia, 2000, 2001). The communication of this information ensures that employees have a mental map of the probable impending events of such a decision thus preparing them psychologically for change (ibid.).

Further communicating to employees that such layoffs will be carried out in the most swift and expedient manner is another factor that may comfort employees and show that top management is genuinely concerned with their wellbeing (Appelbaum & Donia, 2000, 2001). This is true insofar as the actual downsizing initiative is traumatic and stressful for all involved where approaching the event in a long-drawn manner would only work to add on further strain to the already difficult circumstances for the survivors (ibid.).

Top management would need to further communicate to the employees the benefits and compensation programs for those who leave and stay as well as the availability of other job opportunities through the development of employability (Thornhill & Gibbons, 1995; Baruch & Hind, 1999; Appelbaum & Donia, 2001). Such resources may include a comprehensive career resource library and network holding, assessments, counseling and online job postings (Appelbaum & Donia, 2001). Top management may then open the floor for questions and concerns for which employees wish further clarification (Appelbaum & Donia, 2000). Employees may be further assured that human resource managers will be available to address further questions, suggestions and concerns (Brockner, 1992; Thornhill & Gibbons, 1995; Doherty, 1996; Appelbaum & Donia, 2001).

Making the Final Decision and Preparing Managers for it

Reconsidering the downsizing decision in light of the insightful ideas and suggestions posed by employees and middle managers is a crucial step that top management should embrace as opposed to warding such suggestions off in favour of the 'quick fix' alternative (Baruch & Hind, 1999). It is

important insofar as it communicates to the employees that their input is valued, respected and taken seriously thus promoting a collaborative relationship (Appelbaum & Donia, 2000).

Top management would need to train managers to expect a wide range of emotions that survivors may display and how to manage such emotions when expressed (Brockner, 1992; Noer, 1993; Thornhill & Gibbons, 1995; Baruch & Hind, 1999; Appelbaum & Donia, 2001). Brockner's (1992) research shows that survivors' painful emotional states are more likely to become destructive (to themselves and the organisation) when they are invalidated, namely, denied or derogated as not making sense. As a result thereof, managers need to be trained to anticipate such emotional states and refrain from warding them off as insignificant, choosing rather to honour and respect them by offering survivors the space to fully experience such emotions (ibid.).

Communicating and Over-communicating the Final Decision to Employees

Appelbaum & Donia (2001) indicate that not only is honest and transparent confirmation of the decision to downsize crucial, but equally important is the over-communication of the decision in a variety of ways such as bulletins, emails, newsletters so as to ensure that the information is accessible to all involved. Brockner (1992) warns top management to ensure that the gap of time between notification of impending layoffs and the final confirmation of layoffs be small as stalling the final decision can feed employees counterproductive fantasies and rumors via the grapevine. He further notes that survivors take cues from each other hence providing another means, through which survivor's beliefs can spin out of control, unless they are counteracted by accurate information (ibid.).

Survivor Management during the Downsizing Process

The management of survivors, as well as the retrenched during the downsizing process, is a crucial influencing factor in the experience of survivor syndrome (Appelbaum & Donia, 2001). In this regard, the manner in which employees are notified as to whether they are to be retrenched or not, impacts on their perception of management as just or unjust (ibid.).

Implementing the Decision to Downsize

During this stage, managers may communicate to employees those who are to be laid off and those who are to be the survivors of the downsizing operation (Brockner, 1992; Noer, 1993; Thornhill & Gibbons, 1995; Caudron, 1996; Doherty, 1996; Sadri, 1996; Baruch & Hind, 1999; Appelbaum & Donia, 2001). In both instances, management would need to exercise best practice guidelines for

treating them with care, empathy and genuine concern. Managers may foster an optimistic attitude by linking employees with outplacement recruiting agencies, offering them severance pay, employee assistance programmes and other support networks, thereafter inviting employees to ask questions and voice any concerns (Brockner, 1992; Zeffane & Mayo, 1994; Doherty, 1996; Appelbaum & Donia, 2001).

The fair treatment of those who leave impacts directly on survivors insofar as their perception of how much of concern and care the organisation invested in handling their friends and peers (Brockner, 1992; Thornhill & Gibbons, 1995; Caudron, 1996; Sadri, 1996; Baruch & Hind, 1999; Appelbaum & Donia, 2001). In view of this, actual fairness may, in fact, not be as important as perceived fairness since survivors use equity theory to validate their observation of the treatment of the retrenched (Sadri, 1996).

Survivor notification would further include reassurance from management of the provision of employee assistance programs, outplacement counseling, the availability of resources for career self-management and role clarification in view of increased workloads (Brockner, 1992; Thornhill & Gibbons, 1995; Appelbaum & Donia, 2001).

What follows is the continual care and management of survivors in the aftermath of the downsizing operation.

Survivor Management and Care after the Downsizing Process

While the management of survivor care prior to and during the retrenchment process plays a critical role in the prevention of survivor syndrome, the aftercare of survivors serves to maintain and sustain such prevention through careful management of survivors. This is achieved through various ways. These include awareness of the changing psychological contract, the provision of employee assistance programmes and incentives, the over-communication of information, support for increased workloads, job enrichment and facilitating the survivor's personal journey through ceremony (Brockner, 1992; Thornhill & Gibbons, 1995; Caudron, 1996; Doherty et al., 1996; Sadri, 1996; Appelbaum & Donia, 2001).

The Promotion of a New Psychological Contract and a Career Resilient Workforce

The continuous aftercare of survivors involves the careful management of the transition between the traditional and contemporary psychological contracts (Waterman et al., 1994; Hiltrop, 1995; Sadri, 1996; Baruch & Hind, 2000; Appelbaum & Donia, 2001).

A key factor that facilitates this transition is the promotion of career self-management and employability for the employees (Brockner, 1992; Waterman et al., 1994; Hiltrop, 1995; Kaye, 1998; Appelbaum & Donia, 2000, 2001). The development of a career resilient workforce has imbued within it the concepts of rapid change, adaptability, flexibility, a new definition of loyalty and lifelong learning (ibid.). This involves employees engaging in a process of self and skill assessment, harnessing vigilance in relation to market trends and gaps within the market and actively scanning the market for opportunities to hone in on various skills (Waterman et al., 1994).

Management is to be held responsible and accountable for putting together a plan of action to support, assist and encourage the career resilience of its surviving workforce (Appelbaum & Donia, 2001). According to Waterman et al. (1994), a good starting point is for top management to support such a process is by assisting surviving employees to regularly assess their skills, interests, values, strengths, weaknesses and temperaments so that they can identify the type of job for which they are best suited.

Managers may continuously hold meetings with employees to take stock of and assess their career development as such insights will be invaluable in relation to their role as apprentice. Whilst acknowledging the role of counselors and managers, Hiltrop (1995) further recognizes the pivotal role that surviving employees may hold in relation to their own self and skill assessment. In view of this, Hiltrop (1995) suggests that employees take time to actively engage in a self-reflective process that is directed towards the goal of optimal job satisfaction and enrichment.

Secondly, top management may enter into a partnership of lifelong learning with survivors where they will be provided with resources to benchmark and update their skills on a regular basis (Brockner, 1992; Waterman et al., 1994; Hiltrop, 1995; Doherty, 1996; Appelbaum et al., 1997; Kaye, 1998; Appelbaum & Donia, 2001). This systemic process requires the creation and maintenance of a continuing dialogue between management and survivors in terms of the companies business direction and a constant assessment of the market pulse as a means through which this direction is informed (Hiltrop, 1995). Having researched ways in which managers can support this process, Kaye (1998)

stresses the importance of management and employee working in a cooperative and collaborative manner where there is a focus on co-creating investment plans, speculative investing and strategizing for mutual gain.

Waterman et al. (1994) and Hiltrop (1995) recognize the benefits of running a workshop, but warn that a continuous and constant approach needs to be embraced if long-term change is to be expected. In light of this, they suggest the development of a career development centre within the company where surviving employees will have access to a comprehensive career resource library and a computer network career centre where they will have rapid and timely access to physical and online job postings (ibid.).

The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) as a Source of Continuous Support

While EAP practitioners and counsellors provide invaluable service to layoff victims, survivors and the organisation at large during the downsizing operation, their services should not end at this stage of the downsizing operation (Zeffane & Mayo, 1994; Thornhill & Gibbons, 1995; Caudron, 1996; Doherty et al., 1996; Sadri, 1996; Appelbaum & Donia, 2001). Rather, a focus should be vested on the continuous and sustainable use of EAP counsellors in the post-downsizing context (ibid.). Survivors should feel that EAP counselors are accessible, that they are genuinely concerned with their welfare, and most importantly, that they provide a safe and containing environment in which survivors may express their concerns and distress regarding the downsizing initiative (Caudron, 1996; Sadri, 1996; Appelbaum & Donia, 2001).

Sadri (1996) notes the value that can be gained when the company establishes an in-house EAP centre where survivors can visit counsellors voluntarily at the company's expense and during company time. While such an option may appear costly on a short term basis, the long term benefits far outweigh the costs as it provides a convenient service to survivors by investing in the promotion of their emotional wellbeing (Sadri, 1996). The provision of an external EAP support service provider via a free telephone number is a highly effective means through which survivor expression and confidentiality thereof can be ensured (Thornhill & Gibbons, 1995).

While the provision of EAP services may ensure the free expression of their concerns, the over-communication of information regarding survivor care is equally important.

Over-communicating Information for Survivor Management

Brockner (1992) raises an important point, “just because information was *sent* to the surviving workforce does not ensure that the said information was *heard* by the workforce” (p. 21). The need to communicate and over-communicate information in the post-layoff environment is deemed essential if rumors via the grapevine are to be avoided (Brockner, 1992; Caudron, 1996; Appelbaum et al., 1997).

Apart from communication via television networks, electronic newsletters and bulletin boards, face-to-face communication is the best and most effective way in which information can be transmitted as it translates the human element of personal care (Brockner, 1992). In view of research pertaining to teaching survivors how to thrive, Caudron (1996) describes how one company embraced the face-to-face approach by implementing a monthly open forum meeting in which survivors could meet with the chief executive director during work hours to have their questions and concerns answered. When conducted, such a forum was so successful that it was then held twice every month (ibid.).

The provision of extrinsic rewards and incentives for survivors in the post-layoff environment has been identified as a helpful measure that mitigates against negative survivor responses.

The Provision of Extrinsic Rewards and Incentives

Brockner (1992) and Appelbaum et al. (1998) stress the benefits in providing survivors with a comprehensive reward and incentive scheme in the aftermath of the layoff as a means through which they may become more committed to the job at hand and feel more empowered in general. Survivors are more likely to adapt to the post-layoff circumstances if they are publicly rewarded for reaching goals set out for them (Brockner, 1992).

Further benefits of an efficient incentive programme are that it sends clear messages to survivors about the organisation's values and therefore helps to reinforce human resources and business strategy. Gainsharing has been identified as an effective incentive program to motivate survivors towards the overall objectives of the company (Appelbaum et al., 1998). It involves encouraging employees to think and act as business owners as it gives employees reason to care and increase productivity by linking their bottom line with the company's bottom line (ibid.).

The Provision of Survivor Support in response to Increased Workloads

Since burnout due to increased workloads is a key symptom of survivor syndrome, the need to consider ways in which this situation can be managed is imperative if managers are to achieve an adaptive workforce (Brockner, 1992; Caudron, 1996; Doherty, 1996; Sadri, 1996; Baruch & Hind, 2000; Appelbaum & Donia, 2001). Research on the management of this experience, identifies the clarification of new survivor work roles as a central factor in such management (Caudron, 1996).

Hence, while it may be necessary to downsize for cost containment, it is equally important for managers to communicate the microscopic view in relation to how survivors jobs have changed and how they individually contribute to the bottom line such that role ambiguity is avoided (Brockner, 1992; Caudron, 1996). A frank assessment of such roles is important such that unnecessary work loads can be eliminated thus reaping stress, time and cost saving benefits for the survivor and the organisation as a whole (Brockner, 1992).

What follows is a description of how survivor management can be promoted through improving survivors' intrinsic rewards.

Survivor Management through Job Enrichment

While extrinsic rewards are necessary to motivate survivors towards achieving organisational objectives, redesigning survivor tasks and job functions is equally important in order to ensure that survivors experience their new job roles as personally satisfying and enriching (Brockner, 1992; Doherty, 1996; Appelbaum & Donia, 2001). Brockner's (1992) research into the management of survivors shows that if survivors' work has become intrinsically interesting, then their productivity and morale should increase. Appelbaum & Donia (2001) alert managers to bear this challenge in mind when developing creative ways to improve survivor job satisfaction.

Facilitating the Survivor's Personal Transition in the Post-downsizing Context

Survivor management prior to, during and after the downsizing operation characteristically mobilizes the organisation, management and the survivors to urgently utilize various resources that may enable the smooth running of organisational operations (Brockner, 1992; Doherty, 1996; Doherty et al, 1996; Caudron, 1996). Fairly neglected within this context is the recognition that on a deeper level, survivors experience a labyrinth of emotions and attitudes pertaining to their individual and personal transition in light of the recent layoffs (Caudron, 1996).

There is a need for change management, which recognizes the individual perspective, since individual transition and personal development concerns interrelate with the organisational change needs (Doherty et al., 1996). A starting point is for management to acknowledge survivors' emotional upheaval allowing them the opportunity to express their discontent (Caudron, 1996).

Doherty et al. (1996) found positive results when management held three two day workshops with survivors where they were given pre and post workshop questionnaires that provided them with the opportunity to reflect and work through how the downsizing had personally affected them. It was found that such workshops encouraged employees to honour and grieve about the past, helped them to acknowledge the chaos and discomfort caused by the change and helped them to develop skills for experiencing the change as an opportunity for personal growth (ibid.).

Formal ceremony has been identified as a key factor in helping survivors to recognize this transition by acknowledging change and their reactions to it (Brockner, 1992). This can be accomplished by encouraging small groups of survivors to go out for lunch with the purpose of discussing the change in the workplace or by the organisation holding special meetings on company time during which change is acknowledged (ibid.). While on the surface these initiatives may appear time and cost taxing, the long-term benefits have been shown to outweigh these drawbacks (Brockner, 1992; Caudron, 1996; Doherty et al., 1996).

Summary

This chapter reviewed the salient research and literature conducted concerning the experiences of survivors in the context of retrenchment. The chapter was divided into three sections, offering a holistic understanding of the nature of survivor responses, the various factors influencing survivor syndrome, as well as the management of survivors throughout the retrenchment process.

When faced with the challenge of retrenchments, survivors respond in various ways, some positive and some negative. Negative survivor responses facilitate the experience of survivor syndrome where survivors experience a marked difficulty coping with the situation for various reasons. Survivor syndrome seriously mitigates against the success of a downsizing initiatives since negative survivor responses influence attitudes and behaviours at work, thus affecting the productivity and overall success of the organisation.

Three key factors have been identified as influencing the promotion of survivor syndrome. The first of these relates to the change from traditional psychological contract to the contemporary one, which results in a change of survivor expectations from lifelong employment with an organisation to employability and career resilience. A second source of survivor syndrome is survivor perceptions of the retrenchment process as fair or unfair. The difference in survivor personality characteristics and psychological adaptation following retrenchments has been identified as a third factor that can either promote or thwart the experience of survivor syndrome.

Managing survivors in the context of retrenchments is a challenging task but one that is crucial in the prevention and management of survivor syndrome. Effective and thorough management should take place prior to, during and following the retrenchment process for both the survivors and employees that have been retrenched. Measures taken to manage this situation should convey the message of care, empathy and genuine concern for survivors' wellbeing through all three stages of survivor management.

The following chapter briefly details the context of the current research.

CHAPTER TWO - SETTING THE CONTEXT

The following chapter provides a brief description of the context within which this research is conducted. The first section outlines the broader social context within which South African organisations are located and influenced. This section also offers an outline of the case of survivor syndrome in the South African context as well as how the decision to access Distell as a research site was reached.

The second section offers a brief background to the case, outlining the events that led to the decision to retrench as well as the options available to employees in light of this decision. Other issues relating to the context within which this study is located will be discussed in the methodology section of this document.

Broad Social Context

The prevalence of downsizing and retrenchments surrounding the global corporate arena has escalated in recent years (Sadri, 1996; Appelbaum et al., 1997; Thornhill & Saunders, 1998; Kinnie et al., 1998; Appelbaum et al., 1999). This prevalence has been felt most acutely in North America and the United Kingdom, followed by other countries such as Latin America, Eastern Europe, Japan and Sweden (Appelbaum & Donia, 2000). Sadri (1996) and Appelbaum et al. (1999) reveal statistics indicating that between the period of 1994 and 1999, over 85% of Fortune 500 firms have downsized and 100% are planning to do so by 2004.

The prevalence of downsizing in corporate South Africa is no exception to the global prevalence of this practice (Innes, 1998; Ray, 2000; Ngambi, 2001; Bhorat, 2002). The frequency of downsizing practices in the country is heavily influenced by the state of South Africa's economic position at any point in time (Innes, 1998; Bhorat, 2002). The country's economic position is, in turn heavily, influenced by various global and local forces that stimulate fluctuations for local economic indices (Gerber, Nel, & Van Dyk, 1998). Some global forces that have established economic turbulence in recent years include, the September eleventh attacks on the United States of America, the impending war in the Middle East and the fate of African countries such as Zimbabwe (Cross, 2001; Bhorat, 2002). The economic impact of these global forces seriously undermines the enthusiasm and confidence that, foreign investors may hold in relation to global and local investments (Innes, 1998; Cross, 2001).

Such global forces coupled with the following local forces have strictly tested South Africa's economic resiliency beyond measure. One of the most powerful local forces that has influenced the country's economic market in the past and still does at present, is the effects of South Africa's political history during the Apartheid regime (Innes, 1998; Ngambi, 2001). Despite the negative impact of this history on the economic state of the country, the abolishment of Apartheid in 1994 and the reigning of a new democratic government functioned as powerful forces in gradually replenishing confidence levels in relation to foreign investment (Innes, 1998). However, while confidence in the country is in its process of re-establishment, other local forces such as the high incidence of crime, HIV infection and poverty successfully threaten this recovery further (Gerber et al. 1998; Ngambi, 2001).

The aforementioned local and global forces have and still are exerting phenomenal pressure on organisations constituting corporate South Africa to survive and thrive in order to 'aid' the 'ill' economy (Anstey, 1996; Finnemore, 1999; Ray 2000; Bhorat, 2002). The threat and reality of downsizing in this context, has therefore become a common practice utilized by organisations to respond to change of a large scale and hence to ensure survival (Innes, 2001). The prevalence of retrenchment as an effect of downsizing has exacerbated already alarming levels of unemployment, further perpetuating the economic struggle (Innes, 1998; Ray, 2000).

According to Xinhau (2001; as cited in Ngambi, 2001) statistical figures as of 2000 indicate that South Africa is experiencing a high unemployment rate, officially standing at approximately 40%. This figure is reinforced by the government agency Statistics South Africa, confirming that unemployment was implicated to have risen from 31.2% to 42.1% as of the 2001 census (Nxumalo, 2003). While these sources do not indicate exactly how much of that percentage constitutes unemployment as a result of retrenchments, Ray (2000) reveals that since 1994, over 500, 000 jobs have been lost in all sectors of the economy due to downsizing.

Bhorat (2002) sheds further light on this carnage by stating that the largest sector contributing to a high incidence in downsizing and retrenchments is the public sector where 145, 000 jobs have been shed over the five-year period between 1995 and 1999. He further identifies the most common form of downsizing to be that of attrition and indicates that these figures reveal a public employer attempting to drastically shrink its workforce (Bhorat, 2002).

In view of the prevalence of retrenchments in South Africa, only one study has been found that researched the experience of retrenchment survivors in the context of this country. Littler, Wiesner and Dunford (2003) conducted a study which compared the dynamics of downsizing amongst middle managers in the following three countries, namely, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.

Their findings revealed that most South African organisations chose the decision to retrench based on the objective of reducing labour costs so as to improve labour productivity. With this in mind, many managerial layers were removed resulting in improved decision making, labour productivity and customer service.

While this reflected a short-term benefit, a long-term challenge required serious consideration, namely the consistent negative impact on survivor's morale, loyalty, motivation, and sense of job security. Littler et al. (2003) concluded that despite certain economic benefits, South African managers were not immune to survivor syndrome and that time had made no difference to this issue.

While this study confirmed the experience of survivor syndrome by South African organisations, issues relating to South Africa's political past and present are not discussed either as an area of enquiry or one that emerged from the research. Moreover, in its focus on the experiences of middle management survivors, this study excludes the experiences of employees that are the survivors of such a retrenchment process. In view of this, research on the experiences of retrenchment survivors that are employees at South African organisations is limited hence the focus of the present study.

Choosing the Research Site

Through the purposive nature of the sampling and the deliberate seeking out of survivors of a retrenchment process, the setting for the present research had to be guided by this intention (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). As such, various organisations were contacted telephonically so as to determine whether each of these had experienced one or more retrenchment drives in the recent year or two. The researcher therefore defined, 'recent' as a time period of not more than two years within which survivors would have experienced the threat of retrenchment.

Distell was considered an appropriate research site for the following reasons. Firstly, unlike other organisations that were hesitant to host research of this nature, Distell expressed enthusiasm and

willingness to do so thus implying a certain level of commitment and cooperation. Secondly, the company had experienced a staggered retrenchment drive within the defined time periods and survivors would therefore have experienced the threat of retrenchment a year to two years from the time of data collection. Finally, voluntary participation of survivors was obtained. The human resource manager opened an invitation to all employees on the floor who had experienced the threat of retrenchment to participate in the research should they feel comfortable to do so. A number of employees volunteered to participate. This was crucial when researching a relatively sensitive area such as the experiences of survivors following retrenchment.

Background to the Case

Distell is a South African alcoholic beverage company holding an established and well-balanced portfolio of national and international brands. Brands range from Nederburg and Oude Meester to cream liqueur such as Amarula as well as ciders including Savanna, Hunters, Klipdrift and others.

Distell was created in 2000 by the merger of two other companies, namely, Stellenbosch Farmers Winery and Distillers Cooperation. A staggered retrenchment drive constituted a key resultant factor of the merger and therefore resumed in two time periods, namely, late 2001 and mid 2002. The retrenchment process took place for various reasons. Key amongst these was the fact that the merger had brought together many employees and some mechanism had to be employed to reduce this number.

Retrenchments took place at both the Greenpark and Monis branches of the company. The Greenpark branch experienced voluntary as opposed to forced retrenchments during late 2001. Employees were told that should they decide not to take the voluntary packages, they could re-apply for either their old job at Greenpark or another job at the same branch. Those who chose to apply for another job at Greenpark would have to accept a drop in salary since they would require training in a different field.

As regards the Monis branch, a decision was made to close the branch for various reasons and retrench all Monis employees during mid 2002. Employees at the branch were offered a choice of either accepting the voluntary packages offered to them or re-applying for a position at the Greenpark branch or any other branch owned by Distell. In this regard, Distell wished to offer any excess positions first to its staff rather than open such applications to the public. Most retrenchments at Monis were

voluntary where management offered employees packages for their services with the company. A few forced retrenchments did take place in this regard.

The sample of survivors selected for the present study therefore included a mixture of employees from the bottling division of the Greenpark branch of Distell as well as survivors from the Monis branch. All employees were interviewed at the Greenpark branch.

Summary

This chapter has outlined and set the context within which the present study has taken place and should be understood. The chapter introduced the broad social, political and economic setting of South Africa within which downsizing and retrenchments as a result thereof have become increasingly prevalent. The importance of understanding survivor experiences in this context is made clear by limited South African research in this area, thus laying a valid justification for the present study.

This chapter concludes with a description of the background to the organisation or case chosen for the study and how the researcher went about accessing it as an appropriate site for research of this nature.

The following chapter includes a discussion of the qualitative methodology employed in this study as is congruent with researching the experiences of retrenchment survivors.

CHAPTER THREE – METHODOLOGY

The objective of this study was to investigate the experiences of survivors in the aftermath of retrenchments. This objective was achieved by using an exploratory case study methodology located within a qualitative framework.

Description of the methodology employed in this research is divided into seven sections, namely: the philosophy underpinning the research, the case study method, sampling technique, data gathering method, data analysis and interpretation, issues relating to the quality of research and a summary of this chapter. Due to the qualitative and exploratory nature of the research, these sections are discussed in significant depth so as to thoroughly contextualise the method.

Philosophy Underpinning the Research

Qualitative Research Methodology

Qualitative research methodology was appropriate for the present research in so far as it focused on uncovering the meanings ascribed to the subjective experiences of retrenchment survivors as was lived and undergone by them, use was made of semi-structured individual interviews.

This methodology therefore focuses on the subjective meanings, metaphors, definitions, symbols and descriptions of specific events and experiences in an attempt to capture the meaning of the social world in the form of written or spoken language (Neuman, 1997; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). It uses language as a tool through which fluid reality in context is investigated and therefore uncovered (Punch, 1998; Winegardner, 2001).

Qualitative research focuses on an inductive approach to knowledge generation where theories and principals are generated from data collected through observation and intuitive understandings gained in the field (Punch, 1998; Winegardner, 2001). The present research made use of an inductive approach as abstract themes and eventual propositions were generated through the employment of interviews, thus providing the researcher with a comprehensive understanding of the various issues raised in view of the experience of retrenchment survivors.

Since qualitative research seeks to obtain an emic or insider perspective into the phenomenon under investigation, the researcher of this study immersed herself into the subjective life-world of the survivors of retrenchment in order to understand the world through their lenses (Winegardner, 2001).

This raised questions regarding the subjectivity of the researcher's perspective. As is noted below, this was dealt with by being aware of her biases and presuppositions regarding the research area.

Thick description of the experiences of retrenchment survivors was achieved by interviewing participants within their natural setting, namely, the workplace. Qualitative research usually involves fieldwork where the researcher enters a field such as a setting or institution in order to observe the behaviour and actions of participants within their natural setting (Neuman, 1997; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Entering the field allows the researcher to obtain rich, thick description of the phenomenon underhand and satisfies the objective of an exploratory study where the researcher attempts preliminary investigations into unknown areas (Neuman, 1997; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999; Winegardener, 2001).

The following section focuses on the ideological underpinning of the present research, namely, phenomenological-hermeneutic.

The Phenomenological-Hermeneutic Approach

A congruent approach with qualitative research, this ideology was well suited for the present study since it enabled the researcher to understand the meaning of experiences as understood by survivors of the retrenchment process. The phenomenological approach is an area of the interpretive paradigm that seeks to describe and understand the meaning that certain events and actions have for the people involved (Sokolowski, 2000). As such, it describes the structures of lived experience as they present themselves to the consciousness of the participants, thereby furnishing insight into their worldview (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

An important feature of adopting the phenomenological approach is the practice of phenomenological reduction, which entails being cognizant and critical about one's presuppositions, preconceptions and prejudices concerning the outcome of such research (Sokolowski, 2000). This process requires bracketing one's fore-structure of understanding so as to develop and awareness of one's taken-for-granted assumptions characteristic of the natural attitude (Kvale, 1996). In view of this research, the researcher took note of the following presuppositions.

Firstly, a presupposition that the experiences of retrenchment survivors would reflect a negative impact on the survivors and the organisation in question. Secondly, a presupposition that this experience

would be perceived by the survivors as traumatic both personally and as related to the workplace. Finally, a presupposition that this experience could perhaps provide an impetus for change or personal growth of some kind.

While the phenomenological component of research focuses on participants' lived experience as retrenchment survivors, the hermeneutic component of inquiry focuses on interpreting the phenomenon, firstly from the perspective of literature, then by allowing the descriptions of the phenomenon to assert their meaning (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Through this approach, interpretive analysis involved building up a web of interpretation from text and theory which both provide a more accurate and superior account of the experience of retrenchment survivors.

The following section outlines the method of research employed by the present study, namely, the case study method.

The Case Study Method

The present research made use of the case study method as located within a qualitative research design (Gillham, 2000). This method of research is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance or phenomenon that seeks investigation within its real-life context (Yin, 1994).

Case studies may be categorised by the epistemological research framework that the researcher chooses to work within (Gomm, Hammersley, & Foster, 2000). Apart from working within a positivist framework, an interpretative orientation is one where access to reality is assumed to be made through social constructions in the form of language, shared meanings and consciousness (Winegardner, 2001). An interpretive orientation was employed in this research project in view of its congruence with the theoretical underpinning employed.

Case studies can be classified by purpose, namely, to describe, explain or explore a particular phenomenon (Yin, 1994; Tellis, 1997). While explanatory case studies are well suited to causal studies through the explanation of complex phenomenon, descriptive case studies seek to describe several states by comparing the data about each states activities with the other (Winegardner, 2001). The present research makes use of an exploratory case study since it sought to explore the experiences of retrenchment survivors where existing knowledge and theory of this phenomenon is limited in the context of South Africa (Gomm et al., 2000).

Independent of epistemological orientation, a case study may consist of a single case or multiple cases (Stake, 2000, as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Winegardner, 2001). A single case design includes an intensive investigation into a single case (Gomm et al., 2000). Within a single case study, further differentiation is made between a holistic case or an embedded case study where the former refers to the study of one main unit such as an organisation and the latter refers to a main unit with sub-units of study (Winegardner, 2001). The present study made use of a single, embedded case study where the main unit of study was the organisation, namely, Greenpark branch of Distell and the various sub-units of study include the retrenchment survivors who are employees at the organisation. The unit of analysis in this project was the retrenchment survivors exclusively as opposed to other employees at Distell.

A characteristic feature of a case study is that it seeks to investigate a particular phenomenon within a bounded system or context (Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1991; Yin, 1994; Gomm et al., 2000). This means that certain features reside within the boundaries of the case and other features outside of this (Feagin et al., 1991). A crucial factor that determines the inclusion of features within the bounded system is the context within which it is embedded (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Bearing awareness of the case as tied in context allows for 'local groundedness' where data can be collected in close proximity to the situation at hand (Yin, 1994).

Defining the boundaries of a case has been described as a challenge (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The focus of study in this research was the retrenchment survivors. The boundary of the case was, therefore, made up of the context within which survivor experiences were investigated, namely, the bottling division of Distell's Greenpark branch. Sampling operations further established the boundary of the case, as is the focus of the next section.

Sampling

Under circumstances where researchers cannot study all the circumstances, events, or people related to a particular phenomenon intensively and in-depth, samples are selected (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Sampling is therefore a process of systematically selecting cases such as individuals, groups or organisations for the inclusion in a research study (Neuman, 1997).

Where quantitative sampling relies heavily on randomly selecting people from a population pool, qualitative sampling contrasts markedly to involve sampling with a purpose in mind, namely, purposive sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Mason, 1996; Neuman, 1997). This sampling involves carefully selecting a group of people with the objective of gaining a deep understanding of a certain phenomenon experienced by such people (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

Within case sampling with a purpose in mind describes the technique used for the present research (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Due to the bounded nature of the case, the focus was not on the facilitation of generalisation but on maximising rich and comprehensive information pertaining to the experience of retrenchment survivors (Gomm et al. 2000). As such, sampling was theoretically driven with no focus on representing a particular population.

Decisions regarding the sampling strategy followed.

Sampling Strategy

Various sampling strategies may be employed when engaging with purposive sampling (Holliday, 2002). The present study made use of sampling typical cases which involved including information on the grounds that it is known to arise from special cases, namely the cases of retrenchment survivors (Flick, 2002). According to Miles and Huberman (1994), typical cases highlight what is normal and average in the research field thus increasing confidence in findings.

The sample for the present study constituted respondents that were self-selected. Survivors at the Greenpark branch of Distell were notified of the research intentions and given an information sheet documenting the objectives of the research and assurance of issues pertaining to voluntary consent as well as confidentiality and anonymity (Appendix A). Also included in the sheet was a guide of the semi-structured questions they would be asked should they volunteer to participate in the study. Following the presentation of the information sheet, seventeen survivors initially volunteered to participate in the study and respective times were set up for in-depth interviews with the assistance of management.

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2003) note the importance of reflecting on the implications of samples that are self-selected, since the choice to participate or not may be linked to factors such as time

constraints, willingness to divulge experiences of a personal nature and skepticism of conducting research on a certain area. The researcher of the present study held awareness of such motives throughout the research process, bearing in mind the implications of these motives on the findings of the research. As such, the implications of volunteering to participate or not were considered insofar as how they may shape the findings of the research.

Maykut and Morehouse (1994) suggest that the sample size in any qualitative design should be determined by a point of theoretical saturation but that this would need to be balanced by other factors that may impinge upon the research enterprise such as time, money and other factors. Due to the impingement of practical factors such as leave and absenteeism, only fourteen survivors were available to be interviewed in the present study.

What follows is a detailed description of the sample of survivors chosen, with the present research in mind.

Subjects of the Study

The 'actors' of the present study were the fourteen retrenchment survivors, as referred to by Miles and Huberman (1994). Biographical information regarding this sample included the following. The sample consisted of seven males and seven females. The demographics of the sample were five coloured males, six coloured females, two black males and one black female. Ages ranged with nine employees in their thirties, three employees in the forties and two employees in the fifties.

Eight of the employees were survivors from the Greenpark branch and the remaining six were survivors from the Monis branch of the company. All employees worked within the bottling division of Greenpark and held various work positions where the majority of the employees was machine controllers, while others were packers and security guards of the division.

Data Gathering Method

The following section describes the manner and procedure through which data were gathered for the present study bearing in mind the context within which this occurred.

The present research employed fourteen semi-structured interviews as a primary mode through which rich and comprehensive information pertaining to the experience of retrenchment survivors were gathered.

Functioning as a common and fundamental source of case study information, the qualitative research interview sought to understand and infer meaning from themes of lived daily world as experienced from the respondent's perspectives (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999; Holliday, 2002). The objective was therefore to gather descriptions of the respondents' *lebenswelt*, i.e. the lifeworld, as is encountered in direct and everyday life by the respondent and given in direct and immediate experience, independent of and prior to explanations (Kvale, 1996).

The choice of data collection technique requires consistency with the research objectives, purposes and strategy employed in any study (Saunders et al., 2003). In view of the aforementioned description of a qualitative research interview, the choice of this data collection method was congruent with the epistemological orientation of this research, namely, a qualitative, interpretive and phenomenological-hermeneutic case study approach. As such, the research interview focused on a descriptive and interpretive account of retrenchment survivors consciousness and experiences as guided by various themes in the literature (Flick, 2002; Saunders et al., 2003).

The bounded nature of case studies dictate that information gathered from interviews are meaningful when considered in light of the particular context within which they take place (Yin, 1994). The qualitative research interviews for this study were all conducted in a room within a building that was separate from the central business units at the Greenpark branch of Distell. This location was chosen in light of the fact that it might offer an inviting and non-threatening context within which respondents could discuss their experiences free from management sight. The selection of a non-threatening location is considered critical when interviewing respondents about experiences that may be challenging on a personal or emotional level (Holliday, 2002).

Interviews took place with the assistance of semi-structured questions (Appendix B) that guided the emergence of rich and comprehensive information relating to the experiences of retrenchments survivors. Semi-structured interviews are suited to exploratory or explanatory research and involve questions that are derived from a list of central themes noted in the literature of a particular area (Flick,

2002; Saunders et al., 2003). They are therefore neither free conversation nor highly structured questions, allowing flexibility for probing important areas of investigation as directed by the interviewee (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

The semi-structured questions were developed from some of the following themes in the literature, i.e. employee attitudes and responses to the retrenchment process, perceptions of fairness or unfairness, employee perceptions of support offered by management etc.

The interview guide consisted of a variety of questions designed to elicit different information that would illuminate a holistic understanding of survivor experiences following retrenchment (Holliday, 2002). These included open questions designed to obtain description of a situation or event, such as: “What were you told about the retrenchments”, and closed question designed to obtain specific information: “Did management explain to you why there would be retrenchments?” Also included were probing questions used to explore a particular focus of direction of significance to the research topic such as: “how did you feel when you were told about the retrenchments?” The use of reflection where a statement made by the respondent was paraphrased using their own words, was often used when probing an area of interest (Saunders et al., 2003).

Interviews were approximately forty-five minutes in duration and were tape recorded with the consent of the respondents. Respondents were assured that such tapes were to be handled by the researcher only and not to be heard by management. They were also assured that the research was being conducted for academic purposes and not directed by management in view of impending retrenchments. Tapes were transcribed and formed into a readable text that was free of redundancy. Such interview transcripts provided the basis for the next stage research, namely, data analysis.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Unlike quantitative analysis which builds on applied mathematics and is concerned with the process of measuring variables, qualitative analysis involves the processes of concept formation and refinement such that relationships amongst these concepts may be examined (Saunders et al, 2003). Qualitative analysis therefore relies on conceptualisation to capture the richness and holism associated with data in the form of text, written records, phrases, or symbols that describe or represent people, actions, or events (Neuman, 1997). As such, the objective is to infer meaning from the data by examining

people's words and experiences through an inductive approach where research findings are derived from data (Holliday, 2002).

The present research made use of thematic analysis as located within a descriptive-interpretive approach (Boyatzis, 1998). This technique of analysis was chosen since it provided a tool for making inferences by systematically identifying specific characteristics within the text. This was considered appropriate since it guided the researcher insofar as themes, codes, categories and propositions could be generated so as to understand the experiences of retrenchment survivors. An interpretive-descriptive approach to data analysis is congruent with the phenomenological-hermeneutic underpinning and was appropriate for this research since it related both to describing survivor experiences as well as interpreting such experiences in relation to prior literature and research carried out in the field (Flick, 2002).

The employment of a qualitative approach to analysis demands that the stage of data analysis occur simultaneously with other stages such as data collection, interpretation and report writing (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Hence, unlike quantitative analysis, which may occur as a separate stage during the research process, the qualitative researcher has to be equipped to such an interactive approach to analysis.

A decision on the appropriate approach to data analysis was followed by a process of reduction, which involved summarizing and simplifying the data through the means below.

Categorisation

Proceeding transcription, raw data in the form of fourteen interview transcripts were reread many times through the process of immersion such that a fairly good idea of the sorts of findings that will emerge was ascertained (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). This process of familiarisation involved rough note-taking as well as drawing diagrams to make sense of the findings.

The rough data was then classified into meaningful categories, in accordance with emergent thematic patterns, such as, employee reactions when notified of the impending retrenchments (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Themes therefore refer to units of meaning derived from patterns such as conversation topics, feelings and recurring activities (Boyatzis, 1998). According to Saunders et al. (2003), the labels for such categories may be derived from terms that emerge from the data, terms that

have been used by the participants or terms used in existing theory and literature. For this research, a combination of all three sources, was used to label such categories.

Attention was focused on ensuring that such categories were both meaningful in relation to the data as well as to other categories such that a well structured analytical framework was developed (Flick, 2002). This set the stage for the next step, namely, unitisation.

Unitisation

The process of unitising data involves identifying chunks or units of meaning in the data and relating such units to the appropriate categories that have emerged in the prior stage (Boyatzis, 1998). Such chunks or units of meaning are called indicators and refer to the actual verbatim quotations and statements offered by participants during the in-depth interviews (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

According to Saunders et al. (2003), the process of unitising data requires a systematic method in order for valid and coherent conclusions to be reached. While some researchers may chose to use index cards that are cut and paste in order to administer such structure, the present study indexed emergent categories by recording where they occur on the respective transcripts (Dey, 1993). This involved a combination of underlining key phrases as well as noting word repetitions then indexing the category in the margin of the transcript, for example, SUR/RESP refers to survivor responses and SUR/STR/LINK refers to a link between survivor responses and the choice of retrenchment strategy.

Structuring and Displaying Data

A conceptually structured data display was then employed to present indicators with their appropriate categories such that coherent and justified conclusions could be drawn (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Saunders et al., 2003). This type of data display was considered over other types such as partially ordered display, role or time display since the present study involved a clearly defined set of variables based on some prior ideas derived from theory.

Data was displayed manually in the form of a tabular matrix with the rows representing central themes and sub-themes and the columns representing the indicators associated with the various themes and sub-themes (Saunders et al., 2003). The number of each interview script was noted alongside the respective indicators such that each statement or sentence could be traced to the respective interviewee

(Saunders et al., 2003). This assisted in keeping track the context within which certain statements were voiced.

Themes and sub-themes were established and labeled through the constant comparative method (Makut & Morehouse, 1994; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). This multi-tasking process involved comparing and contrasting each new unit of meaning to all other units of meaning in order to subsequently group these together (Mason, 1996). Through this process of continuous refinement, initial categories were either changed, merged or done away with, as well as related themes were combined and catalogued into sub-themes (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). This process was exercised until central themes and their respective sub-themes emerged.

The systematic arrangement of central themes and sub-themes in the form of a data display promoted the ease and speed through which clear conclusions could be drawn (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The tabular arrangement of data allowed for the comparison of subject responses across various themes and sub-themes as well as the how often a certain response was replicated. Such an arrangement therefore promoted the achievement of an integrated understanding of the experience of retrenchment survivors in a manner that made theoretical or conceptual coherence (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Building a Logical and Coherent Understanding of the Phenomenon

This was the final and critical stage in qualitative data analysis since it involved piecing together the patterns of findings and a rich and comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation was built (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

The process involved noting down the central themes as well as disconfirming evidence that had to be accounted for through the use of two methods, i.e. 'enumerative induction' and 'eliminative induction' (Boyatzis, 1998). The former related to counting the number and variety of instances going in the same direction and the latter related to testing the preliminary hypotheses with alternatives. Both methods were used in the present research to build an integrative understanding of the experience of retrenchment survivors.

The employment of strategies such as counting and noting the relations between concepts were employed in order to generate meaning from the findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As noted earlier, counting included noting the number of times a particular theme occurred as well as the consistency

with which it occurred in a certain manner. For example, ten out of fourteen employees did not experience guilty or heart sore feelings towards those who were retrenched and all ten subjects attributed the reason for such an attitude to be related to the type of retrenchment strategy. In this way, the number of employees who held this attitude was noted as well as the fact that it was consistently held because the strategy chosen was that of voluntary retrenchment.

Noting relations between concepts involved discovering what sort of relationships resided between two or more concepts such that conclusions could be drawn from these. In the present research, attention was focussed on determining such relationships in cases where they emerged from the findings (Boyatzis, 1998). For example, a relationship between employee's responses to the news of retrenchment was related to the type of retrenchment strategy used as ascertained through the strategy of clustering and counting. The present strategy of noting relations between variables ascertained that satisfied employee responses were related to voluntary retrenchment specifically.

While the aforementioned described the process of analysis and interpretation followed during the present research, attention will now turn to quality issues as related to qualitative research. In particular, factors relating to validity, reliability and generalisability in the context of an exploratory single-design case study are noted as well as bias regarding the interview process.

Quality of the Research

Interviewer Bias

The case of interviewer bias is a factor that requires serious consideration when conducting qualitative research since the method of data gathering is a subjective process (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Researcher bias in this context refers to the manner in which the researcher impacts and affects the data emanating from the interviews (Flick, 2002).

As noted earlier, the process of phenomenological reduction functioned as an important means through which the researcher of the present study mediated interviewer bias. This involved a self-reflexive approach where the researcher monitored how her emotions might bias the findings by being mindful of her preconceptions and suspending her personal judgements such that data could be collected in a bias-free manner.

By adopting a self-reflexive approach, the researcher was cautioned against leading survivor responses according to her preconceptions outlined earlier, but rather entertained responses precisely as they were given to her.

Interview bias was also addressed by clearly articulating her intentions to the research participants prior to the interview. This included conveying to them who she was, and her key purpose in conducting such research as well as what she planned to do with the findings.

Research Reliability

Within a qualitative framework, reliable research refers to the consistency of research findings and relates closely with the quality of the research process (Holliday, 2002). Functioning as a precondition for research validity, reliability is threatened by any careless act in the data gathering process or by ambiguity of various sorts.

Bearing this in mind, to ensure the maintenance of reliability throughout the research process, the researcher attempted to develop and describe the research question and design of the study in a clear and non-contradictory manner such that every step of research was congruent and consistent with the former. Moreover, every attempt was made to explicitly define her role and status as researcher of the study.

As regards the gathering and analysis of data, multiple observer bias was avoided since only the researcher collected and analysed data. Such analysis was given to a colleague to check and confirm the accuracy of the analysis process.

Research Validity

Qualitative research is considered valid insofar as it is useful and worthwhile in helping the researcher, participants and others to gain a deeper insight and understanding of the meaning of the phenomenon under investigation (Saunders et al., 2003).

The findings of the present research provide rich reflective material for the survivors concerned as regards raising their awareness to their experience of the retrenchment process as well as the means through which they chose to cope with the situation. The findings benefit management since they are offered a window on the life-world of their employees and their perception of the management of the

retrenchment process as well as areas of growth they could consider in the future. The findings therefore offer guidance as to the job satisfaction of a workforce that are inevitably the linchpins of future profitability at Distell.

Research validity was also attained by clarifying and checking the participants' responses both during the interview and at the end of the research (Flick, 2002). In this regard, copies of the findings were made available to participants for validation of their experiences as retrenchment survivors.

Moreover, validity is enhanced if the research proves to be believable, coherent and logical, given the research question, data collection, processing and interpretation of material (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The researcher has ensured that validity of this nature was achieved insofar as a unified, non-contradictory and comprehensive picture of the experience of retrenchment survivors was presented in a manner that addressed the research question, namely, what is the experience of retrenchment survivors at Distell?

Validity is also ensured through the suggestiveness and potential of the research to provide fertile ground for raising questions that stimulate further research and interpretation (Kvale, 1996). This is especially applicable to the present research since the experiences of retrenchment survivors has been a sparsely researched area in the South African context and the idiosyncrasies such a context may present in view of its political past and present. The propositions of this research may then raise issues that may stimulate further research in the area within the South African context.

Generalisability

Generalisability refers to the transferability of conclusions to other contexts (Gomm et al., 2000; Gillham, 2000). Qualitative researchers assert that the traditional or positivist definition of generalisability is not suited to research concerning individuals where questions about meaning and perspective are central and ongoing (Gomm et al., 2000).

However, the question of generalisability in view of employing a single case study design within a qualitative framework requires mention.

According to Yin (1994), single or multiple case studies involve only analytic generalisations where cases are used to illustrate, represent or generalise to a theory and not a population. In view of this,

generalisation is possible if central themes within one's research findings tie into the body of theory (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

The present research can be considered generalisable insofar as themes emanating from the findings are tied with broader themes of survivor responses, work attitudes, behaviours and perceptions of the management of the retrenchment process. Bearing in mind the context of the research, the researcher maintains that such themes can therefore be transferred to and have a bearing on other contexts as related to the individual experiences of retrenchment survivors.

The generalisability of case study research as naturalistic and therefore context-specific. This factor renders the transferability of findings across settings as problematic and challenging (Yin, 1994).

In view of the bounded nature of the present case study, the experience of retrenchment survivors is unique since the research was conducted at a South African organisation and is therefore shaped by the political past, social and economic forces impacted on any workforce in this context. However, due to the high rates of unemployment and retrenchment as a form of downsizing in this context, not only is the South African context a relevant and appropriate context within which to study this area but also a necessary one in view of a sparsely researched area. In light of this, generalisability of this research can be considered high.

The findings of this research will not only be accessible to the participants of the study and, management at Distell. Rather, such findings will also be documented in media sources such as journal articles to facilitate awareness raising and recommendations for the management of retrenchments aimed at organisations intending to retrench. In this regard, special issues applicable to the South African context may be raised for consideration when retrenchments are inevitable.

Summary

This chapter has described and explained the method employed to investigate the experiences of survivors in the aftermath of retrenchment.

Congruent with the objectives of the study, a qualitative framework with a phenomenological-hermeneutic underpinning was chosen since the research aimed not only to describe, but also to understand the experiences of retrenchment survivors.

The study made use of a single case exploratory design since the area of investigation has been sparsely researched in the context of South Africa.

Semi-structured interviews were used as the primary data gathering method through which insight into the subjective life-world of retrenchment survivors was obtained. The chapter further recorded the parameters of the sample selected as well as the means through which this selection took place.

A detailed discussion of the analysis of raw data once collected, was also included and related to categorisation, unitisation, the manner in which data was displayed as well as the strategies employed to generate a comprehensive and coherent understanding of the experience of retrenchment survivors.

The chapter concluded with a discussion of the means through which the quality of research process was addressed. Limitations of this research will be addressed in the final chapter of this study.

The following chapter records the findings of the study.

University of Cape Town

4 CHAPTER THREE – RESULTS

This chapter comprises the findings obtained from this research. It constitutes a thematic synopsis of collective responses obtained through fourteen semi-structured interviews, where each key theme is explained and followed by an explanation of sub-themes within these. Direct quotations are italicized to illustrate central themes and sub-themes in a manner that adequately addresses the life-world experiences of all employees.

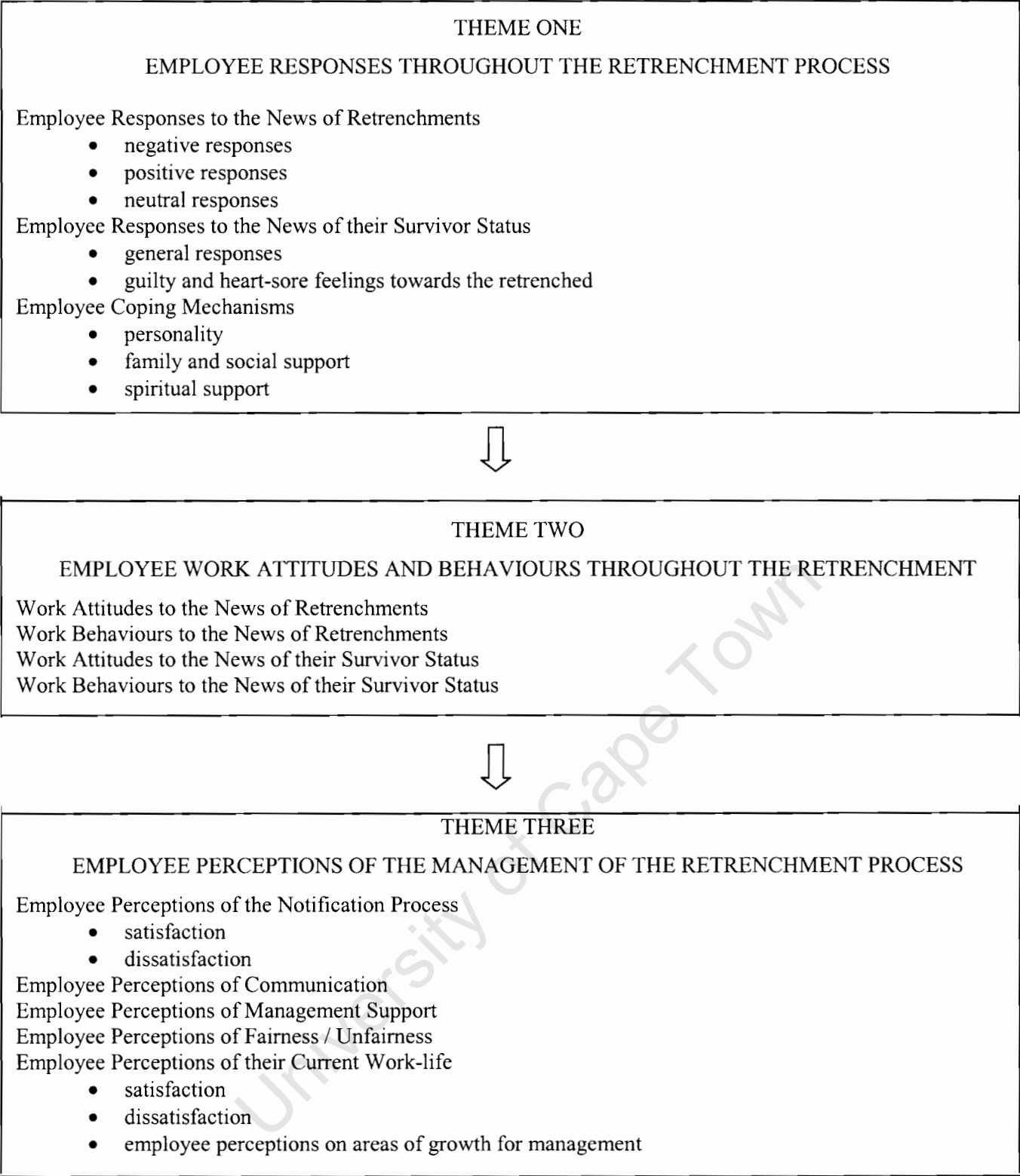
The first central theme to emerge is employee responses throughout the retrenchment process. Specific factors that emerge relate to employee responses to the threat of retrenchments, employee responses to their survivor status as well as the various coping styles utilized by employees during their time of adversity.

The second central theme to emerge relates to employee work attitudes and behaviours throughout the retrenchment process. Specific sub-themes that emerge include employee work attitudes and behaviours in response to the news of retrenchments as well as their survivor status.

The third central theme to emanate is employee perceptions of the management of the retrenchment process. Specific sub-themes that emerged include employee satisfaction / dissatisfaction with the notification process, management's communication throughout the process, the support they received from management throughout the process as well as perceptions of fair / unfair management of the retrenchment process. Further sub-themes that emerged were employee perceptions of their current work-life including their relationship with management. This chapter concludes with employee suggestions in which management can improve or grow.

The results of this chapter are represented in Figure 3.

Figure 3 Representation of Results obtained in this Research



Employee Responses throughout the Retrenchment Process

The first key theme to emerge in this study is the employee emotional responses throughout the retrenchment process. The first sub-theme to emerge is employee responses to the news of retrenchments.

Employees Responses to the News of Retrenchments

This sub-theme addresses the range of emotional responses that emerged when employees were notified of the impending retrenchments. Subjects experienced negative, neutral and positive responses to this news.

Negative Responses

Nine out of fourteen employees experienced negative responses to the news of impending retrenchments. A number of respondents commented that these responses influenced their capacity to function at work. The range of responses emanating from the data included the following.

A number of respondents commented that their immediate response to the news of retrenchments was sadness and unhappiness. They experienced the sadness as a dominant and pervading emotion often affecting their ability to think clearly.

Feeling pressured was another response that was experienced by many employees. They felt that the news of impending retrenchments reminded them of their financial responsibilities thus resulting in them feeling pressured. The experience of pressure was heightened when respondents were the only bread-winner in the family.

Employees experienced fear, worry and preoccupation simultaneously when they heard the news. This was often experienced when they realized the full implications of this reality and was followed by questions relating to their fate such as, what was going to happen to their family and how were they going to manage this situation.

Majority of the respondents commented that the experience of fear, worry and preoccupation was often followed by extreme uncertainty about the future. This sense of uncertainty made them feel as though they were losing control over their life and often exacerbated feelings of anxiety.

A number of employees expressed shock and disbelief at the reality that their company might be retrenching employees and that the threat of job loss for them was real. Respondents described feeling, *“thrown by the news – I couldn’t believe how such a big company that was almost world known could go through retrenchments.”* Another reported, *“when I heard the news I went weak – I always thought that this company is an established place in South Africa.”*

Employees felt that the company had betrayed them by making the decision to retrench. *“All those years was good, but when there are retrenchments, they thought nothing of us, we didn’t mean anything to them”*. Another respondent commented on giving twenty of her best years to the company to help it grow and when there are retrenchments, *“They don’t see me through.”* The experience of betrayal led them to feel angry and bitter at management’s decision.

Employees spoke about holding a suspicious and skeptical attitude towards management’s motives to retrench. They did not trust management and felt that management was playing *“sick games”* with their future. In view of such feelings, they did not believe much of management’s explanations for the need to retrench.

Finally, a number of employees reported feeling a sense of loss when faced with the threat of retrenchment. The experience of loss was described as similar to the loss of a loved one where they might never see their work friends again. Employees described losing members of their *“family”* when faced with the reality of retrenchment.

A few positive responses to the news of retrenchment emanated from the study.

Positive Responses

Two out of fourteen respondents commented on feeling positive and confident when notified of the impending retrenchments. One employee commented on feeling confident since she felt that she was a valuable asset to the company since she had performed well over a number of years thus encouraging human resources to think twice about retrenching her.

Another employee felt confident for a different reason. She commented about feeling safe because of her age, namely, she was younger than the stipulated criteria for retrenchment and therefore fell out of this age group.

Neutral Responses: Neither Positive nor Negative

Three out of fourteen respondents commented on feeling unaffected by the news of retrenchments.

One factor related to old age and the number of years spent in service. Two out of the three employees commented on the fact that they were prepared and willing to be retrenched since they had devoted a number of years in service and were therefore happy to retire. In this regard, both employees felt that it didn't matter whether they were retrenched or not.

The third respondent experienced a neutral attitude to the news of the retrenchment having just given birth to a baby. She expressed a deep desire to be with her baby and therefore didn't mind losing her job to fulfil this desire. She said, *"If I'm retrenched its fine and if I'm not, then it's also fine. It is not a train-smash."*

While the above responses have illustrated how employees responded when they were notified of the retrenchments, the following responses document how employees responded when they learnt that they were survivors of the retrenchment process.

Employee Responses to their Survivor Status

General Responses

This emergent sub-theme addresses how employees experienced the news of their survivor status at Distell. Responses varied, with the majority of the respondents experiencing positive emotional responses, and a few employees experiencing disappointment to this status. The experience of survivor guilt and heart-sore feelings towards those that were retrenched also emerged from the interviews, as well as reasons for the experience of no survivor guilt.

Eleven out of fourteen respondents felt *"overjoyed, relieved, calm and relaxed"* when they learnt that they were the survivors of the retrenchment process. They further commented that previous negative responses, such as stress, uncertainty and worry disappeared with the arrival of this news. As one employee put it, *"You feel down in the dark when you don't have a job, but when you do have one – you see the light again and you can think, sleep and work without worrying."*

Three out of fourteen respondents felt that the news of their survivor status didn't bother them. Reasons for this attitude mirrored the reasons they offered when notified of the impending retrenchments, namely, old age and number of years in service.

While the immediate responses to their survivor status varied, the reality of losing their work friends emerged as an important finding.

Guilty and Heart-sore Feelings towards the Retrenched

A few respondents were affected by the retrenchment of their work friends. They experienced guilt for different reasons. Two of the four employees reported feeling guilty since they were still employed and their work colleagues were retrenched. A factor that exacerbated this feeling was the awareness that the financial package offered to them would not last.

Another respondent expressed feeling guilty because he was young and his friends were older, bearing in mind that age was a determining factor for the decision to retrench. As he says, *"I was feeling sad and guilty about this cos they told me that its easy for me cos I'm still young but they are not young."*

Yet another employee reported feeling guilty because she had to work in positions that were previously occupied by her colleagues. This made her feel unworthy of being a survivor as she felt she was betraying her friends by taking their places.

Apart from these responses, the majority of respondents, namely ten out of fourteen reported feeling very little or no heart-sore and guilty feelings towards the retrenched. All of the respondents attributed this response to management's decision in offering voluntary packages as opposed to forced retrenchment. Two key factors related to this reason emerged.

Firstly, respondents were happy and satisfied that the older employees were offered voluntary packages. They felt that these employees were more than willing to leave as well as they were satisfied with the packages they received. This gave respondents peace of mind.

Secondly, most respondents felt that the young employees were given a chance and a choice to re-apply for a position at the company and they chose not to. As one employee put it, *"they could have applied like we did and they chose not to. We made our choices and they made theirs – we told them*

not to take the packages cos the money will run out, but they did not listen to us – so they have to live by the consequences – so we don't feel guilty.”

While the first two sub-themes have documented employee responses to the threat of retrenchment and well as their survivor status, the various ways in which employees coped with this situation emanated as the next sub-theme.

Employee Coping Mechanisms

A few employees expressed difficulty coping with the situation and continued experiencing negative responses to the situation, even after learning about their survivor status.

Of the fourteen employees interviewed, nine reported coping with the retrenchment process by using various coping mechanisms. The following emerged as factors, which assisted employees to cope with the situation by mediating the negative responses they experienced. Personality emerged as one of these factors.

Personality

Most of the respondents indicated that various aspects of their personality equipped them to cope with the situation in an effective manner.

Some employees attributed their ability to cope to the following characteristics, namely, *“easy-going, friendly with well-developed interpersonal skills.”* As one employee put it, *“when you are this type of person, crisis just slides over you and you can manage its effect.”*

The capacity for respondents to be positive and optimistic in their outlook was another powerful personality characteristic that promoted coping. They further commented that this trait enabled them to persevere and be vigilantly on the lookout for opportunities.

A prominent factor that emerged was the tendency for employees to be outspoken and extroverted. Such traits enabled them to voice their concerns easily as opposed to *“bottling”* them. As one employee said, *“I don't believe in keeping my concerns inside, if I'm not happy with something, I am up-front with management and get it off my chest – this has helped me to cope.”*

A number of respondents described their refusal to listen to rumors as a personality characteristic that they were proud of and which they believed to have helped them to maintain an emotional balance. Employees comment, *"I am not the type of person who likes listening to rumors. I prefer to block them out and use selective listening"*. They preferred to listen to the facts directly from management rather than be swayed by unfounded rumors: *"discrimination was fundamental if you didn't want to get caught in the emotional roller-coaster...half of the rumors were untrue so why get stressed out for nothing."*

Another factor that promoted coping was the capacity to be resilient in the face of such adversity. Faith in themselves, the belief that things will turn out fine as well as the will to persevere despite setbacks, illustrate this capacity.

Apart from personality, family and social support emerged as another resource that employees used to cope.

Family and Social Support

Six employees reported gaining strength, hope and inspiration from family and friends, which assisted in the alleviation of negative emotional responses.

Employees felt optimistic when consoled by family and friends. This, they say, helped them to gain some perspective on the situation, thus mediating some of the negative responses experienced during this time.

The inspiration they received from family and friends also helped them to persevere. As one employee commented in reference to her sister, *"She always had a few inspirational words to keep me going. It really helped. It really gave me hope – through other friends encouragement, I also made it."*

One employee commented on her friend's proactive approach in supporting her by, setting up an appointment for her with the social worker. She felt that this assisted her in facing up to her reality.

Apart from personality, social and family support, many respondents drew courage through existential means as the following illustrates.

Spiritual Support

Seven respondents commented on faith in God and prayer to be a primary source of strength, courage and hope in their time of adversity. Many felt that there was a, *“higher purpose for all this happening – you have to trust God and throw your life in His hands – this helped me to accept the situation and cope with it.”*

The next central theme to emanate from the research was a description of employee work attitudes and behaviours throughout the retrenchment process.

Employee Work Attitudes and Behaviours throughout the Retrenchment Process

Employee work attitudes and behaviours in response to the news of retrenchments as well as employee’s survivor status, emerged as key sub-themes.

Employee Work Attitudes to the News of Retrenchments

Twelve out of fourteen respondents felt that the knowledge of impending retrenchments affected their attitudes towards their work negatively. Key amongst this was a decrease in morale, demotivation, and the experience of apathy since employees saw no use in investing in their work if they were going to lose their jobs.

Seven respondents commented that after the news of retrenchment, they just did what they were appointed to do and refused to work the extra mile for the company. They adopted an apathetic *“don’t care”* attitude since they felt it futile to work hard when they might be losing their job. This is expressed by statements such as, *“I always gave my work 100% but when the news came, my morale fell and I didn’t feel like working anymore. Why should I? Nobody is going to see – you don’t worry, even if this place’s performance was the best in 20 years, it didn’t matter anymore.”*

A minority, namely, two respondents felt that the news of retrenchments had no impact on their work attitudes. They attributed this nonchalant attitude to the foresight that those employees who chose to take the voluntary retrenchment packages would suffer later since their finances would eventually run out. This mindset led employees to feel security in the fact that they were better off re-applying for a job with the company rather than letting the news of retrenchment affect their work attitudes negatively.

Employee Work Behaviours to the News of Retrenchments

Negative work behaviours emerged as a common expression to the news of retrenchment. Absenteeism, preoccupation at work where employees were unable to concentrate on their work as well as an unwillingness to offer their full cooperation, were work behaviours that they commented on.

Ten out of fourteen respondents commented that they stayed home often and neglected their work when they learnt about the retrenchment. Poor performance at work was another response to this situation since employees often felt like “zombies” preoccupied by the news. The reasons for absenteeism and apathy stemmed from their disillusionment with the decision to retrench where they did not see any need to invest in the company in view of the impending retrenchments.

These work attitudes and behaviours were short-lived for most of the respondents as the next sub-theme illustrates.

Employee Work Attitudes to the News of their Survivor Status

An improvement in work attitudes emerged once employees were notified of their survivor status. Ten out of fourteen employees felt like it was a new beginning and described feeling elated, supernatural, safe, motivated, dedicated and more committed to their work.

One employee commented, “*Everything changed, I felt an ownership with my work – a motivated commitment*”. Another reported, “*I became much more positive and just wanted to do my work. My attitude changed, I was relieved and wasn't negative anymore.*”

These attitudes set the stage for the emergence of the next theme, namely, employee work behaviours to this news.

Employee Work Behaviours to the News of their Survivor Status

Employees indicated that they worked harder and “*gave their all*” after being notified that they still had a job. While this was the case, the motive for investing greater effort in their work varied.

For the majority of employees, namely, nine out of fourteen, fear was a powerful motivating factor that drove such behaviour. They described working hard as though it was their last week in the hope that

this behaviour would insulate them from possible retrenchments in the future. This is implied by the following, *“while I was positive, I thought of my friends who were going to sit without a job and that made me more dedicated because that could so easily be me.”*

Another employee worked harder in response to an angry and rebellious attitude towards management and their treatment towards her during the retrenchments. She commented, *“at first, I wanted to ‘mess’ around with a ‘don’t care’ attitude cos I was disappointed in management, but then I realised that it wasn’t worth it cos that is what they wanted. So I told myself to show them that I am still the same person who was dedicated to her work and instead of giving them 100%, I gave them 120%.”*

The third central theme to emanate from the research was employee perceptions of the manner in which the retrenchment was managed.

Employee Perceptions of the Management of the Retrenchment Process

This central theme reflects employee perceptions of the manner in which the retrenchment process was managed. Diverse responses were obtained as regards the specific sub-themes that emerged from this theme. These include employee satisfaction / dissatisfaction with the notification process, communication by management throughout the retrenchment process, the provision of support by management and the perceived fairness/ unfairness of the retrenchment process.

The theme concludes with sub-themes that relate to employee perceptions of satisfaction / dissatisfaction with their current work-life including their relationship with management as well as employee recommendations of the various areas of growth that management may consider in relation to the retrenchment process and work-life in general.

Employee Perceptions of the Notification Process

Emerging from this theme is respondents’ level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction when notified of the impending retrenchments. This related to whether they were satisfied with the content of the news, the amount of information they were given about the process and the reasons for the decision to retrench.

Satisfaction with the Notification Process

Seven out of fourteen subjects were satisfied with the notification process. Reasons for their satisfaction varied as the following illustrates.

Employees were satisfied since they were provided with enough information regarding the retrenchment as well as the reasons for such a decision. They were happy with management's forthright and transparent explanation of the need for retrenchment and the plans for such a decision.

A further source of satisfaction was the timely notification of the decision to retrench. As one employee said, *"we were satisfied cos we were notified well in advance – six months to a year ahead, therefore it didn't come as a shock cos we were prepared for it."*

A few respondents commented on management's re-assurance of the availability of jobs if they decided to re-apply for work at the company. They felt that this reassurance gave them courage and encouraged their satisfaction on the notification process. Emanating from the research was also dissatisfaction with the notification process as the following illustrates.

Dissatisfaction with the Notification Process

Seven of the fourteen subjects reported experiencing dissatisfaction with the notification process. While most employees expressed dissatisfaction at the lack of information regarding the retrenchments, others were disgruntled with the lack of clear and transparent information pertaining to the reasons for retrenchment.

Employees interpreted the aforementioned as *"management is hiding information from us"*. The feeling of being *"kept in the dark"* led them to question the motives behind management's decision, thus promoting a sentiment of distrust towards management.

Employees' perception of management's communication with them throughout the retrenchment process emerged as the next sub-theme.

Employee Perceptions of Communication throughout the Retrenchment Process

Emerging from the research was employee perceptions of the level of communication they received from management as regards keeping them abreast with new developments during the retrenchment process.

Almost all, namely, eleven out of fourteen subjects were satisfied with the level and manner through which management attempted to consistently communicate with them throughout the retrenchment process.

Respondents were very satisfied with management's use of the following modes of communication, namely, monthly face-to-face meetings, pamphlets and posters that were available on notice-boards indicating new developments on the retrenchment process, communication via email and vacancies of other job postings that were advertised through the company.

One employee expresses this satisfaction *"we got informed about what's happening in the company on a monthly basis. They also communicated a lot by email and posters on the notice boards. Communication was good – they kept us on our toes and this kept us focussed."* This sentiment was endorsed by most of those interviewed.

Employees were also satisfied with the timely reception of communication, *"whenever something came out early in the morning, they would immediately post it and we would get the information by the afternoon. In this way, we were always informed of what was happening about the retrenchments, so we had no problem."*

A few employees expressed dissatisfaction with such communication commenting that management, particularly human resources had a lot to learn by way of clear and transparent communication and tendency not to evade employee concerns.

Emerging from the interviews is the next sub-theme, namely, whether employees perceived management to offer their support during the retrenchment process.

Employee Perceptions of the Provision of Support throughout the Retrenchment Process

Almost all, namely, eleven out of fourteen subjects felt that management had offered them sufficient support, which assisted them in coping with the process.

Employees commented on management's provision of psychological services in the form of counseling either by a psychologist or social worker to be *"very helpful and comforting."* They also

mentioned the provision of a hotline counselling service should any one of them had felt more comfortable with this alternative.

Employees commented on the provision of financial support by management towards further studies in any area such as hairdressing etc. They appreciated this support and felt that it reflected genuine concern for their wellbeing on the part of management.

The provision of financial management and investment advice by management for those that chose voluntary packages emerged as another source of satisfaction for respondents. They perceived this as, *“Management cares by educating those employees on ways to make their money last longer.”*

They were further satisfied by management’s efforts in assisting them to secure a job either through re-application at the company or seeking employment elsewhere. Employees perceived this proactive behaviour as proof that management would assist them instead of leaving them in the lurch. The provision of time that was set aside to address employee concerns emerged, as another source of support management provided for employees.

A few respondents felt that management did not provide them with any support throughout the retrenchment process. They did not elaborate on reasons why they felt this way.

Emanating from the findings is the next sub-theme relating to whether employees perceived the retrenchment process to be managed in a fair or unfair manner.

Employee Perceptions of the Fairness / Unfairness of the Retrenchment Process

A significant division in employee perceptions emerged with respect to this sub-theme where some experienced the process as fair and others as unfair. Reasons for such perceptions and attitudes are illustrated below. In view of this, some employees perceived the process as both fair and unfair. In such cases, their responses are split and documented in the respective themes below.

Employee Perceptions of Fairness

Most of the employees perceived the management of the retrenchment process as *“fair and just.”* Reasons for this perception were diverse as is shown below.

A number of employees perceived the process as fair since management, *“did not just forcible retrench people, but they gave everyone a choice – you didn’t just get fired, you were offered a voluntary package.”* In light of this, most employees did not perceive voluntary retrenchment as a form of retrenchment. Rather, they understood retrenchment as forced retrenchment and voluntary packages as being offered a *“choice”*, which was perceived as a fair option.

Perceptions of fairness were also related to the early notification given by management regarding the decision to retrench. Employees felt that early notice offered them ample time to prepare for the retrenchments such that this decision was not experienced as a shock.

One employee felt that the process was fair since the retrenchment affected all levels of management, not just the working class to which she belonged. *“It was fair cos it started at administration with the whites, then to the middle, then to us at the cellar.”* This made her feel that the class she belonged to was not victimized by the decision, but rather the effects of retrenchment were shared by all, bearing in mind South Africa’s political past and the effects of racial discrimination.

Another employee used the provision of *“good packages with good benefits”* offered to those who chose this option as a cue in deciding whether the process was carried out in a fair manner.

Satisfaction with the packages colleagues received led them to perceive the process as managed in a fair manner. Perceptions of unfairness emerged as experienced by a few respondents.

Employee Perceptions of Unfairness

Employees felt that there was inconsistency in terms of the criteria set out for retrenchment and the implementation of such criteria. As one employee said, *“Last in, first out was what they told us, but today it shows that it doesn’t work that way cos it all depends on your age - if that is the case then they must not tell us that they chose based on that criteria. I think that was unfair.”*

Other employees perceived the process to be unfair since they felt that experienced people were retrenched and inexperienced people were employed in positions in which they lacked sufficient experience. In this sense, employees felt that management did not acknowledge the training and experience they had to offer.

The reduction of some employees' salaries emerged as another factor that promoted the perception of unfairness. Employees felt betrayed, hurt and angry that they were given an ultimatum of either accepting the drop in salary or leaving the company. This was exacerbated when employees were inundated with large financial responsibilities such as a bond for their home etc.

Issues relating to South Africa's political past and racial discrimination featured prominently as factors that influenced the perceived fairness of the retrenchment process. Employees felt that the merger and retrenchments were carried out for the benefit of the white man only, *"Even after all these years, this is a Boer dominated company."*

Another employee reiterates this sentiment, *"this process was very unfair cos after all these years, the ceiling is still white and the floor is still black"*. Yet another comments, *"the one that farms, stays on one side and the black, unskilled workers like us, are kept separate. That is very unfair – we are treated like pigs. Those that were retrenched were treated like animals, they worked themselves sick for this place and in the end, they weren't seen."*

While the aforementioned responses have documented employees experiences and perceptions of the retrenchment process, their level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction as survivors in their current work-life emerged as the next sub-theme.

Employee Perceptions of their Current Work-life and Areas of Growth

Emerging from the interviews was employees' perceptions of how they experienced their current work-life as survivors of the retrenchment process. This included their level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of working at Distell, their relationship with management and areas in which they feel management could grow and improve on.

Satisfaction with their Current Work-life

Eight out of fourteen respondents felt very happy and satisfied in their current work-life at Distell.

Reasons for their satisfaction ranged from sheer job satisfaction where they thoroughly enjoyed the type of work they did to feeling satisfied because they perceived management at Greenpark to mimic the Monis work-style, which they preferred.

A few employees expressed satisfaction because they felt that management guided and facilitated their career growth by offering them opportunities on a daily level through which this learning curve could be developed. This made them feel optimistic about the provision of vast opportunities for the younger generation.

Employees also expressed satisfaction at the fact that management was friendly, approachable and embraced an 'open-door' policy where concerns could be openly voiced.

Dissatisfaction with their current work-life at Distell emanated as another sub-theme as experienced by survivors of the retrenchment process.

Dissatisfaction with their Current Work-life

Six out of fourteen respondents felt dissatisfied with their current work-life for a number of reasons.

A source of dissatisfaction for a number of employees was their constant comparison between work-life at the old Distillers and work-life at the new Distel. An increase in the number of rules and regulations at the new company made employees feel tense and anxious at work, *"Here there are too many rules and regulations and you always feel that you are being monitored."* Exacerbating this dissatisfaction was the stringent enforcement of such rules without room for flexibility.

Employees felt that there is too much of window dressing in the company where black people are employed in positions, which they have no prior experience in. A general feeling in this regard is that the company is superficial, pretends to care and employs people based on a *"boetie-boetie thing"*, which they referred to as favouritism.

One employee commented on feeling very negative and demotivated towards the company. He attributes this feeling to the emotional scars left from the retrenchment process, which has caused distrust towards management, *"That experience will always be at the back of my mind, it will never leave me."* Others were still distrustful of management following the retrenchments.

Employee perceptions of the areas in which management could improve emerged as the final sub-theme.

Employee Perceptions on Areas of Growth for Management

Since a fair number of employees expressed dissatisfaction with the manner in which the retrenchment process was managed as well as within their current work-life, employees have suggested areas of growth that management may like to consider in the promotion of a more satisfied workforce.

Employees commented on their preference of the management of the notification process. They preferred clearer and more detailed information regarding the retrenchment process, such as a video explaining the need for retrenchments and a step-by-step guideline concerning the procedure thereafter.

One employee preferred an explanation of the broad organisational landscape and the changing times that required decisions such as mergers and retrenchments to be made. She felt that explanation of this kind would help employees to accept the news of retrenchments.

Those employees who expressed dissatisfaction with management's communication throughout the retrenchment process suggested *"two-way instead of one-way communication"* where management would genuinely listen to them instead of just hearing their concerns. They preferred the adoption of a more forthright, active and interactive stance where management would not evade grievances.

As regards their current work-life, employees offered various suggestions on how to make Distell a *"pleasant"* company to work for. Employees suggested the provision of additional training and promotions as incentives that would facilitate their career growth as well as job satisfaction. They said, *"This motivates us to go on and work better instead of being stuck in one place for too long."*

Employees drew lessons from the Monis management department. *"I wish it would be like Monis management – where the MD would visit all the departments and talk to you personally. Here at Greenpark, you are being watched and you will go away and nobody will notice there is anyone else in your position"*. Another subject reiterates the need to be acknowledged and affirmed, *"All you want is a 'thank you for this' and 'thank you for sacrificing that' – that's all."*

Summary

This chapter documented the results obtained and derived from fourteen semi-structured interviews conducted with employees who are the survivors of a staggered retrenchment drive at Distell.

Attention was given to obtaining a rich and holistic insight into the individual life-worlds of the employees with respect to their experiences as retrenchment survivors.

This chapter included a thematic illustration of the findings of this research, summarised into three central themes. The first theme to emerge was employees' responses throughout the retrenchment process and includes three sub-themes that relate to employees' emotional responses to the threat of retrenchments; employees' responses to their survivor status and the coping styles used to adjust to this reality.

The second central theme related to employee work attitudes and behaviours throughout the retrenchment process. Specific sub-themes that emerged were employee work attitudes and behaviours to the news of retrenchments as well as in response to their survivor status.

The final central theme that emanated from the research was employees' perceptions of the management of the retrenchment process. Sub-themes that emerged were employees' perceptions of the management of the notification process, communication throughout the process, the provision of support by management and the perceived fairness of the retrenchment process. Suggestions on areas through which management can improve on in the future also emerged.

The following chapter attempts at relating and integrating the findings obtained in this research to literature and prior research conducted in this field of study.

CHAPTER FIVE – DISCUSSION

This chapter includes a critical discussion of the findings of this study in light of prior research and literature in the field, as is outlined in the literature review of this document. In view of this, survivor experiences following a retrenchment, is located in the context of organisational change and development.

The experiences of retrenchment survivors involve a variety of emotions, some positive and others negative. These range from sadness, anger and fear at the prospect of future retrenchments to relief, joy and guilt that they were the chosen few to remain with the organisation.

The representation of findings of this study can be viewed as a model for understanding this range of experiences and documents the journey that survivors have undergone in psychologically integrating the threat of retrenchment and their experiences as survivors thereafter.

The chapter is structured according to the three themes that emerged from the findings. The first theme addresses employee responses throughout the retrenchment process. The second theme focuses on employee work attitudes and behaviours prior to and after knowledge of their survivor status. Finally, the third theme considers employee perceptions of the management of the retrenchment process. A discussion of the first core theme in relation to prior research and literature follows.

Employee Responses throughout the Retrenchment Process

Findings that emerged from the first core theme reveal that the majority of employees experienced negative responses prior to knowledge of their survivor status rather than after this knowledge. This is related to employees' experience of fear to the threat of job loss when notified of the impending retrenchments. Consequently, most of the employees reported that such negative responses seemed to have been diffused with the news of their survivor status and replaced with feelings of relief, calmness and relaxation at the prospect of keeping their jobs.

Literature on psychological stress sheds light on this pattern of employee responses. Such literature suggests that when stressful events occur, an appraisal process is triggered in which individuals evaluate the implications of the event as a cue on how to respond (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Steele, cited in Wiesenfeld et al., 2001). In this regard, responses are likely to be negative if individuals perceive the stressor as a threat (ibid.). Previous research has identified job insecurity, the loss of

valued coworkers and dissatisfaction with how the layoff is communicated as stressors that are related to survivors' negative responses in the context of retrenchment (Cascio, 1993). The present research is supported by such findings insofar as when such stressors were present (in the context of the threat of job loss), negative employee responses were observed and when they were removed (in the context of the knowledge of their survivor status) majority of employee responses resumed positive.

In her description of types of survivor responses, Kaye (1998) distinguishes between a SOBBO and a HOBBO where the former survivors are successful in moving past the trauma that exists after retrenchments while the latter experience great difficulty in this regard. Two factors that distinguish the one response from the other relate to the manner in which each type of survivor journeys through the mourning cycle as well as differences in personality traits.

As the findings have shown, employees did experience a deep sense of loss at the prospect of losing members of their work "*family*" and described this experience of loss as mourning the death of a loved one. The experience of mourning and loss has been noted by prior research as a key experience of survivors following retrenchment (Kets de Vries & Balazs, 1997; Kaye, 1998; Thornhill & Saunders, 1998; Appelbaum et al., 1998). The present findings serve to further confirm this response as a part of survivor experiences following retrenchment.

Majority of employees attributed their ability to cope with the retrenchment process to their positive, optimistic, open and interactive personalities, which they felt encouraged rational thinking where issues were held in perspective rather than blown out of proportion. Proactive, self-managing, resilient and optimistic personality characteristics have been researched as important in counteracting the negative responses that survivors may be faced with (Kets de Vries & Balazs, 1997; Kaye, 1998; Thornhill & Saunders, 1998; Appelbaum & Donia, 2001). The few employees that expressed difficulty coping with the ordeal even after learning about their survivor status described feeling negative and pessimistic, helpless and out of control as well as a desire to keep such feelings to themselves rather than share them with others. Such personality characteristics have been found to thwart a resilient and adaptable survivor response (Kets de Vries & Balazs, 1997).

The present findings therefore show a likelihood that most employees would have experienced a SOBBO type of survivor response where they experienced the natural stages of mourning for a short period before their resilient, optimistic and extroverted personality traits bolstered them out of this

difficult psychological place. In this regard employees did experience disbelief, anger, fear and loss before reaching a point of acceptance where they began to perceive the new situation as one that was full of opportunity. As one employee commented, *“There are so many opportunities now and we must go out and scan for them.”*

On the other hand, few employees indicated that their emotional responses had not changed and that the trauma of the threat of retrenchments could not be counteracted with the news of their survivor status. Comments such as, *“That experience will always be at the back of my mind, it will never leave me”*, describe this.

The few employees who grappled to move past the negative responses evoked by the trauma of threat of retrenchments resembled a HOBBO type of survivor reaction where they got stuck with such responses even after learning about their survivor status. The continuation of such responses as survivors indicates symptoms of survivor syndrome defined as the experience of negative emotional responses such as sadness, fear, anxiety, disbelief, insecurity, betrayal and loss by survivors following retrenchments. The present research is confirmed by Kaye (1998), Kets de Vries and Balazs (1997) and Alevras and Frigeri (1987, as cited in Appelbaum et al., 1999) prior research in the field. Such research concluded that survivors who experience difficult responses approach an impasse in the mourning cycle and lack the necessary emotional resources of resilience, positive outlook and adaptability to overcome this impasse.

The experience of survivor guilt on the part of a few employees is a further symptom of survivor syndrome. The reasons offered by survivors in view of experiencing such guilt is supported by prior research, namely, the experience of guilt when colleagues lost their jobs instead of survivors and when survivors were working in positions previously occupied by their colleagues (Brockner et al., 1985, 1986).

It is interesting to note that the majority of employees did not experience survivor guilt and attribute this to the provision of voluntary retrenchment rather than forced retrenchment. To this end, the provision of choice by management played a key role in diffusing guilty feelings that survivors might have experienced in view of their colleagues being retrenched. This finding can be understood in light of previous research which suggests a clear relationship between the type of organisational strategy

used to downsize and the nature and level of survivor responses (Labib & Appelbaum, 1994; Thornhill & Saunders, 1998; Appelbaum & Donia, 2000).

Regarding this relationship, prior research findings showed that the provision of voluntary retrenchment were more likely to yield positive survivor responses rather than the provision of a forced retrenchment strategy (Thornhill & Saunders, 1998). Such findings have shown that the greater the managerial control over the downsizing strategy, the more likely was negative survivor responses, namely, the provision of voluntary retrenchment packages mediated negative survivor reactions while forced retrenchment aggravated them (*ibid.*). This finding is confirmed in the present study as employees held their colleagues responsible for not re-applying for a job with the company instead of shifting the blame onto management. In this regard, management's use of voluntary retrenchment mediated any negative survivor responses that might have been raised by this factor.

Apart from personality characteristics, the present research highlighted additional resources used by survivors to cope with the retrenchment process. Obtaining social and family support had been found not only to provide a pillar of emotional strength for survivors during this difficult period but is also a source of social identity with those who have had similar prior experiences (Thornhill & Gibbons, 1995; Caudron, 1996). Employees valued such support and the inspiration they gained from it.

While strong faith in God emerged as an important finding that promoted coping for survivors, prior research in the field has not mentioned this as a source of survivor support (Kets de Vries & Balazs, 1997; Appelbaum et al., 1997; Kaye, 1998; Thornhill & Saunders, 1998; Appelbaum & Donia, 2000, 2001). However, in discussing the process of overcoming adversity in one's personal or work life, Frankl (1997) indicates that the adoption of a spiritual or philosophical approach is a vital stage in the search for meaning during times of adversity. Flach (1988) reinforces this notion by suggesting that the most vital ingredient of resilience in the midst of adversity is faith and the belief that some higher force is guiding people.

Employee emotional responses to the threat of retrenchments and the news of their survivor status impact on their work attitudes and behaviours, as in discussed in the next core theme.

Employee Work Attitudes and Behaviours throughout the Retrenchment Process

Employee work attitudes and behaviours revealed an interesting pattern prior to and following the knowledge that they were survivors of the retrenchment process. When notified of impending retrenchments, negative employee responses paralleled negative work attitudes of low morale and motivation, apathy and job insecurity which was then followed by counterproductive work behaviours such as preoccupation at work, absenteeism, non-cooperative behaviour and poor performance. In light of the knowledge that they were survivors of the retrenchment process, employees work attitudes and behaviours changed to reflect an increase in morale, positive outlook towards work, and ownership and commitment to their work.

While such responses may be understood in light of Cascio's (1993) research implying that in the absence of stressors, employee negative responses resume to normal since they no longer experience such stressors as a threat, another relationship warrants discussion, namely, the relationship between employee responses, attitudes and behaviours. Extended to the downsizing context, Steele (1988, as cited in Wiesenfeld et al., 2001) asserts that negative survivor responses elicited by the implications of such stressors may be cognitive, affective and behavioural in nature.

Insight into the relationship between cognitive, affective and behavioural reactions to events is offered by cognitive-affective behavioural theory which posits that painful emotional reactions relating to behavioural difficulties have their source in patterns of cognition or information processing (Beck, 1995). An extension of this theory to retrenchment may translate as follows according to Beck's (1995) explanation of the cognitive model of processing. When employees are faced with a situation, namely, they have learnt of their survivor status they may experience an automatic thought which, for example, questions how their colleagues were chosen for retrenchment instead of them. This automatic thought may translate into three possible reactions, namely emotional (the experience of survivor guilt), physiological (heaviness in the abdomen) and behavioural, namely, reduced organisational commitment (Steele, as cited in Wiesenfeld, 2001). Employee responses to the retrenchment process in the present research can therefore be understood in view of this theory.

While employee work attitudes and behaviours followed a positive change in view of the knowledge of their survivor status, the present findings show that job insecurity, in particular did not follow this trend. Emerging findings show that employees continued to experience job insecurity even as survivors and that this was coupled with working harder in the hope that such behaviour would

immunize them from job loss in the event of future retrenchments. Prior research in the field attributes an increase in work performance following retrenchment to the experience of survivor guilt and, or job insecurity (Brockner et al., 1986; Brockner, 1992; Kinnie et al., 1998). While experiences of survivor guilt by a few employees did not emerge as being related to increased work performance, employees clearly attributed the reasons for working harder to be related to their job insecurity.

Brockner (1992) and Sadri (1996) suggest that the experience of job insecurity depends not only on the perceived threat of future retrenchments but also on survivors' perception or belief that they cannot control such negative reactions should it occur. Wiesenfeld et al. (2001) research further suggests that the experience of stressors such as job insecurity threaten survivor's self-integrity, of which personal control and self-esteem are components. Brockner et al. (1993) also found that survivors' with low self-esteem were more likely than their high self-esteem counterparts to feel worried and translate such feelings of worry into increased work motivation and performance following retrenchments.

Such prior research suggests that employees continued experience of job insecurity and increased work performance in the present research may in some way be related to a threat to their self-esteem or belief that they would not be able to control the threat of future retrenchments should it occur. While survivors did not make deliberate reference to issues relating to their self-esteem or personal control over the situation, this theory cannot be ruled out.

The third core theme that emerged from the research offered interesting insights into the experiences of survivors as related to their perceptions of the management of the retrenchment process.

Employee Perceptions of the Management of the Retrenchment Process

Various findings that emerged in the field indicate that as a group, most survivors were satisfied and held positive perceptions of the management of the retrenchment process. Employees' dissatisfaction with the management of the process is further noted and provides important insights into the future management of such processes. Employee perceptions of the notification process, communication, the provision of management support, the fairness or unfairness of the process as well as perceptions of their current work-life and areas of growth are discussed below.

Employee Perceptions of the Notification Process

The findings of the research reveal that employees were divided on their satisfaction with the content and manner in which management notified them of impending retrenchments. To this end, half of the employees were satisfied with management's forthright, transparent and timely notification of the impending retrenchments while the other half were dissatisfied with the amount and clarity of information received leading them to feel distrustful toward management.

Prior research in the field asserts that the provision of ample, advanced and clear information regarding the impending retrenchments is crucial in preventing or mediating negative survivor responses at a later point (Brockner, 1992; Thornhill & Gibbons, 1995; Appelbaum & Donia, 2000). The present findings are supported by such research insofar as employees expressed positive responses at their perception of clear, timely and detailed notification and negative responses at their perception of a lack of detailed, clear and timely notification. Such satisfaction or dissatisfaction relates closely to their perceptions of the process as fair or unfair, a key determinant in the emergence of symptoms of survivor syndrome (Brockner, 1992; Appelbaum & Donia, 2001).

Employee Perceptions of Communication throughout the Retrenchment Process

The finding in this study indicates that majority of the employees were satisfied with the consistent and timely modes of communication through which management chose to interact with them. Many felt that such efforts assisted in keeping them focussed and abreast with new developments in a manner that allayed any misunderstandings, rumors or factors which would have promoted the experience of negative survivor responses throughout the retrenchment process.

This finding is supported by prior research which posits that transparent, honest and timely communication in written, verbal or electronic form is key to the management of survivor syndrome (Sadri, 1996; Appelbaum et al., 1998; Baruch & Hind, 2000; Appelbaum & Donia, 2000, 2001). Although research on survivor experiences is limited in the South African context, a South African study researching the value of communication between employees and their managers concluded that prompt, clear and honest face-to-face communication improved trust levels and information flow whilst facilitating organisational change and transformation (Holtzhausen, 2002). Clear and timely communication, therefore, protects such relationships from misunderstandings, false information as well as the perception of inequality, whilst promoting commitment and loyalty (ibid.).

While the majority of the employees were satisfied with such communication, a few expressed dissatisfaction commenting on management's level of communication being one-way rather than two-way where they felt that management often heard their concerns rather than genuinely listened to them.

The distinction between hearing rather than listening to employee's concerns is a crucial factor that can either promote a healthy relationship between the two parties or seriously impede such relations (Appelbaum & Donia, 2001). Poor listening skills on the part of management can send messages to employees that their concerns are trivial and unimportant, leading them to lose faith and commitment in the company (ibid.). The present findings show that this was the case for those employees dissatisfied with management's communication during the retrenchment process.

Employee Perceptions of the Provision of Support throughout the Retrenchment Process

The findings show that employees' perception of the overwhelming support they received from management throughout the retrenchment process played an important role in mediating negative survivor responses.

This held true not only for the support survivors perceived to have received, namely, in the form of psychological services as well as a hotline counseling service, but also their perceptions of how the retrenched were supported. Management's support toward the retrenched involved the provision of financial assistance to further their studies in a different area as well as financial management advice on how to budget their package. In this regard, survivors not only perceived management to genuinely care about their wellbeing as well as that of their retrenched colleagues but they also grew to believe that the decision to retrench was not an easy one, nor one that management gained pleasure from.

Such findings are confirmed by prior research which found that the provision of support in the form of counsellors, financial advisors and job postings for both survivors and the retrenched, sent messages that management genuinely cared about their welfare (Thornhill & Gibbons, 1995; Sadri, 1996; Caudron, 1996, Appelbaum & Donia, 2001). This led survivors to hold positive perceptions of management rather than blaming them for the situation as would be a central feature in the experience of survivor syndrome (ibid.).

The finding in this research is mainly one of employees perceiving the retrenchment process as fair, with a few employees perceiving the process as unfair. A discussion of both perceptions follows.

Perceptions of Fairness

Reasons pertaining to survivors' fair perception relate to the provision of voluntary retrenchment as opposed to forced retrenchment, advanced notification of the impending retrenchments, all levels of management being affected by this process as well as the provision of good packages and benefits to their retrenched colleagues.

Perceptions of fairness relating to the provision of voluntary retrenchment as well as beneficial packages offered to the retrenched can be understood in light of equity theory where survivors compared their situation with those of the retrenched and related this back to them (Brockner et al., 1986; Appelbaum & Donia, 2001). In this regard, survivors used their observations of the manner in which their colleagues were treated as a cue for predicting the treatment they may expect to receive should they be retrenched next, as is noted by interactional justice theory (Greenberg, 1990; Thornhill & Saunders, 1998; Appelbaum & Donia, 2001). To this end, such perceptions of fairness played a key role in determining whether employees experienced symptoms of survivor syndrome.

Perceptions of fairness in relation to the provision of advanced notification can be understood in light of procedural justice theory which relates to employee perceptions of equity regarding the procedures used for retrenchment (Thornhill & Saunders, 1998; Appelbaum & Donia, 2001). As noted earlier, employees' perception of advanced notification as fair, confirmed prior research which cited this factor as crucial in the management of survivor syndrome (Brockner, 1992; Baruch & Hind, 1999; Appelbaum & Donia, 2000).

Perceptions of fairness relating to retrenchments being shared at all levels of management emerged as another factor that is supported by earlier research (Brockner, 1992). Brockner (1992) found that the hierarchical management structure of most organisations plays a key role in this perception since blue collar workers were more likely to perceive the process as unfair should they have perceived white collar workers to continue receiving high salaries and benefits following the retrenchments.

In light of this, the South African context within which the present study is located raises a different dimension that demands consideration, namely, perceptions of racial discrimination. As one employee mentioned, *“It was fair cos it (retrenchments) started at administration with the whites, then to the middle, then to us at the cellar.”* Such statements need to be understood in light of South Africa’s political past marked by the Apartheid regime and racial discrimination as regards the occupation of corporate positions in any organisational context. Implied by this statement is the perception that since Apartheid, not much transformation has taken place at Distell whereby senior and middle management positions are still occupied by whites and positions requiring semi or unskilled labour are still being occupied by non-whites, in this case mostly coloureds and blacks. As such, aside from class or level of management, employees used race as a factor that influenced perceptions of fairness during the retrenchment process namely, that the process was perceived as fair if whites were also affected by the retrenchment.

Perceptions of Unfairness

The few employees that perceived the retrenchment process as unfair raised interesting issues. Amongst the reasons for such perceptions, one is supported by prior research in the field, while the others relate to the effects of South Africa’s political past and present that have not been raised previously due to limited research on survivor experiences in this country.

One reason for employees perceiving the process as unfair related to their dissatisfaction with management’s inconsistency in carrying out the retrenchments according to the selection criteria stipulated at the onset. Employees felt that, whereas they were notified that the selection criteria for retrenchments depended on their work tenure at Distell, retrenchments were later carried out using age as primary selection criteria; leading them to be distrustful of management’s intentions. This reason is supported by prior research relating to distributive fairness where survivors who perceived a mismatch between their own perceptions of selection criteria and that of the organisations, perceived the process as unfair thus promoting symptoms of survivor syndrome (Brockner, 1992; Baruch & Hind, 1999; Appelbaum & Donia, 2001).

The remaining reasons concerning employees’ perception of the unfair management of the process relates to two key factors, firstly, a general feeling that Distell has done very little to reverse the injustices created by the previous Apartheid regime as regards representation of racial diversity in various employee positions. Secondly, employees’ perceptions of unfairness are also related to their

experience of the effects of affirmative action policy, namely, the selection of black employees in positions for which coloured employees perceive them to have less experience, thus leading to the perception of management 'window dressing' such persons through token positions.

On the surface these two factors may sound contradictory, whereby employees on the one hand desire change that reverses previous injustices whilst on the other hand, acknowledge such change at Distell through the administration of policies relating to affirmative action. However, a deeper understanding of the implications of these perceptions may lead to a clarification of employees' general sentiment regarding this. In this regard, employees have clearly articulated their dissatisfaction in general and as regards the retrenchment process whereby they feel that Distell is still predominantly a company, which benefits the white, Afrikaner population. This is perceived through their observation of most senior and middle management positions being occupied by persons that fall within this designated group with a zero representation of this race at employee level, *"Even after all these years, the ceiling is still white and the floor is still black."*

Although research pertaining to retrenchment survivors in South Africa is limited, this finding can be understood in light of Thomas's (2002) research on the application of employment equity in South African organisations. This research found that despite the face of the South African workplace becoming more diverse, this process is not occurring rapidly enough with management structures still being the domain of white males (Thomas, 2002). Such research also shows that this domination is observed both at the level of public and private sectors and negatively impacts on the perceptions of non-white employees who express frustration at the rate of change since 1994 (ibid.).

What is implied by the word, "black" raises a different issue, one that is unique to the experience of many South African employees in light of the administration of legislature that aims to reverse previous injustices (Kanya, 2000; Thomas, 2002). In this regard, the second factor of contention for coloured employees at Distell is that in the post-Apartheid era, instead of reaping the benefits from new legislature which serves to reverse past injustices, they now perceive black employees to benefit more from this very system than they do. Their perception of the use of black employees by management for the purpose of "window-dressing" coupled with their perception that such persons have little experience for such positions than they do, confirms this sentiment. In this regard, coloured employees feel cheated by a system, which disadvantaged them in the past and one that continues to do so in the present, only through a different means.

While research relating specifically to survivor experiences is sparse in the South African context, Kanya's (2000) research regarding popular perceptions of affirmative action in South African organisations is supported by employee perceptions of unfairness in the present research. Such research notes a growing fear amongst coloured employees and professionals that companies are directing affirmative action and "fast track" promotion programs solely at black employees at the expense of coloured employees who feel more experienced for these positions. Kanya (2000) also found that coloured appointees, although technically part of the disadvantaged target groups, were seen as second choices by organisations in the absence of suitable "real" black candidates.

That employee perceptions of unfairness regarding South African specific issues in the present study has been supported by other research pertaining to the perceptions of South African employees in general, indicates that such perceptions are not unique to retrenchment survivors in this country. While prior research in the field notes survivor perceptions of fairness and unfairness to be a key factor in the promotion of survivor syndrome, the careful management of this factor becomes crucial in light of the nuances posed by South Africa's political past and present. This factor requires serious consideration by South African managers in view of factoring such nuances in a model that aims to manage survivor syndrome. What follows is a discussion of employee perceptions of their current work-life and areas in which they feel management could improve on.

Employee Perceptions of their Current Work-life and Areas of Growth

The findings show that many employees expressed satisfaction rather than dissatisfaction with their current work-life for various reasons. While this was the case, employees who expressed their dissatisfaction with organisational life in general and as related to the retrenchment process at Distell offered suggestions on areas in which they felt management could improve on for the future. Such suggestions included a desire for Distell to mimic the style of management under the old company, a desire for training and incentives for career growth and a preference for clearer and detailed information regarding the retrenchments.

Survivor's Comparison of the Old Company with the New Company

A few employees commented on experiencing job satisfaction since the management at the Greenpark branch of Distell was able to mimic the Monis work-style. Other employees expressed dissatisfaction with this factor since they preferred working under the old management system and did not perceive

the current management to mimic the previous work-style. Brockner (1992) found that survivors constantly compared their work-life prior to and after the retrenchments often experiencing a sense of loss for what was.

Kaye (1998) and Kets de Vries and Balazs (1997) reiterate this finding indicating that such constant comparison forms part of the mourning cycle and can therefore function as a source of dissatisfaction with survivor's current work-life. That survivors still miss management under the old company a year or two years following the threat of job loss, is a sign that they are struggling to adapt to management under the new company, hence contributing to dissatisfaction in their current work-life.

Employees raised two key issues that functioned as a source of immense dissatisfaction and which, offers important insights for the development of a satisfied workforce at Distell. Firstly, employees experienced management at the new Distell as too restrictive and "jail-like" where they constantly felt monitored thus contributing to a tense work environment not conducive to productivity. While this style of management may be a feature of the bureaucratic culture at the new Distell, it is clear that employees perceived this style as an indication that management does not trust them enough, thus requiring constant surveillance of their behaviour. According to Appelbaum & Donia (2000, 2001), management's lack of trust in survivor's ability to freely exercise creativity and new opportunities in their work, immediately sets up a block for them that ushers them further into a mindset marked by a lack of motivation and apathy. Noer (1993) and Waterman et al. (1994) refer to this as management treating survivors as children whose behaviour requires constant monitoring as opposed to establishing an adult-adult relationship with employees, marked by respect, dignity and trust.

A second key issue which, functioned as a source of dissatisfaction for employees was their desire to be acknowledged and affirmed through personal contact with management as had been the case in the old company. In this regard, not only did employees feel that their presence was not acknowledged in the company, *"Here at Greenpark, you will go away and nobody will notice that there is anyone else in your position"*, but they also felt that management did not affirm their efforts enough.

Their comment on the managing director taking a personal interest in their wellbeing at the old company also indicates that not only do they desire this contact but they also appreciate it from one whose senior position in the company denotes class and racial hierarchy for them. Caudron's (1996) research on the management of survivors revealed that when the chief executive officer at one

company implemented a monthly open forum day during which he visited employees, such forums were well attended since employees felt acknowledged and affirmed by this interest. Appelbaum and Donia (2001) refer to this as 'management by walking around' and found that where organisations embraced this concept, it demonstrated management's sensitivity and availability during the retrenchment process thus playing a crucial role in the prevention of survivor syndrome.

A Desire for the Provision of Training and Incentives for Career Growth

The findings indicate that while a few employees expressed satisfaction and optimism at management's efforts in facilitating their career growth through the provision of opportunities, others did not perceive management to make such an effort.

Employees noted this point as an area of growth for management whereby they would have appreciate the provision of additional training in a specified field as well as incentives that would scaffold their career growth and promote job satisfaction. Prior research on the management of survivor syndrome found that the provision of comprehensive rewards, training and incentive schemes following retrenchments promoted survivor's commitment, adaptability and belief in the company as one which genuinely cared about their wellbeing (Brockner, 1992; Appelbaum et al., 1998).

Employee statements such as, "*this motivates us to go on and work better instead of being stuck in one place for too long*", have deeper implications in light of issues raised earlier relating to South Africa's political past and present. This holds true insofar as the lack of provision of training and incentives for survivors can be perceived as mechanisms through which management has chosen to stunt the career growth of employees, of which, the majority are non-white. Avoidance of this issue may work to solidify employee perceptions of rank immobility as understood along racial lines. In this regard, management at Distell cannot afford to deny employees the benefits gained through the provision of training and incentives since a lack of foresight on this matter may promote employee's distrust towards management and other symptoms that define a survivor syndrome response.

Management at Distell may consider facilitating employees' career growth by assisting them in regularly assessing their skills, interests, strengths and weaknesses with the help of career counsellors so as to identify the type of job for which they are best suited (Waterman et al., 1994; Kaye, 1998; Appelbaum & Donia, 2001). The development of a career resilient workforce at the company may be particularly important in light of the rapid rate with which South African organisations are choosing

the retrenchment option of recent times (Ray, 2000; Bhorat, 2002). By empowering their workforce in this manner, Distell will not only ensure employees' job satisfaction and career mobility, but will also safeguard any mitigating symptoms of survivor syndrome that employees may present with following the retrenchment.

A Preference for Clearer and Detailed Information regarding the Retrenchment

As was noted earlier, the findings showed that employees were divided on their satisfaction with the notification process. In this regard, while some perceived the notification process as transparent and timely, others were dissatisfied with the clarity and explanation of reasons for such a decision. Dissatisfied employees therefore noted their preferences for this process as one area in which management could improve.

Employees' desire for clear and detailed explanation regarding the retrenchment process and the reasons why this decision was deemed necessary was made through the suggestion for a video recording explaining the process step-by-step. This suggestion is supported by prior research on survivor management which, recommends notification of the retrenchment process through visual means as is denoted in the case of a video (Appelbaum & Donia, 2001). It is noted that notification through this means is effective since it offers a real-life visual and auditory scenario with which employees may identify (ibid.).

Related to the notification process, one employee stressed the importance for management to offer a candid explanation for the reasons why the decision to retrench was deemed necessary. She suggested that management explains the need for retrenchments beyond a microscopic understanding, namely, a result of the merger, to one that reflected a broader explanation of South Africa's volatile economic history, competitive organisational landscape and challenges posed by unemployment, that may have onset this decision at Distell. As such, she felt that explanation of this kind would make the news of impending retrenchments not only easier to understand, but easier to accept and integrate psychologically.

This finding is supported by Brockner's (1992) research which concluded that in cases where management offered employees a broad, macroscopic understanding of the need for retrenchments in view of the socio-political and economic context within which the company was located, employees were more likely to accept the retrenchments. By educating employees about the larger contextual

forces influencing the decision to retrench, management at Distell would have raised the issue of a change in psychological contract from the traditional one to the contemporary one (Waterman et al, 1994; Kaye, 1998; Appelbaum & Donia, 2001). In this regard, employees might have been vaccinated with information influencing their future expectations of working at Distell, namely, their expectation of lifelong employment at the company might have been altered to include a focus on employability and becoming a career resilient workforce (ibid.).

Summary

This chapter offers a discussion and interpretation of the findings obtained by this study in light of prior research and literature in the field. This discussion is located within the three key themes that emerged from the research, namely, survivor responses to the retrenchment process, the influence of such responses on their work attitudes and behaviours and finally, their perceptions of the management of the process.

In the first key theme, the findings show that the majority of survivors who experienced negative responses to the threat of job loss, later experienced positive responses to the news of their survivor status while a few employees continued to experience negative responses even after being notified of their survivor status. Those employees who displayed a typical SOBBO response were optimistic, adaptable and resilient while drawing courage from family, social and spiritual support systems. Those employees who displayed a typical HOBBO response tended to be more pessimistic in their outlook and experienced difficulty integrating the new reality on a deeper psychological level. They also tended to adopt a stoic attitude instead of sharing such pain with family and friends. Both findings are supported by a number of theorists including Kaye (1998), Kets de Vries and Balazs (1997) and Thornhill and Saunders (1998).

In the second theme, negative work attitudes and behaviours experienced at the threat of job loss changed to positive work attitudes and behaviours following the news of employees' survivor status. This held true for all work attitudes except that of job insecurity which, employees continued to experience even after the news of their survivor status. Such insecurity was coupled with increased productivity and working harder for fear of future retrenchments. These findings have been supported by theorists such as Brockner et al. (1985, 1986, 1993), Brockner (1992) and Kinnie et al. (1998).

The final theme revealed that, while survivors were satisfied with the management of the retrenchment process on the whole, there were a number of survivors who expressed dissatisfaction with this process and offered suggestions on areas of growth for management based on this. In general, survivors preferred clearer and more detailed information regarding the reasons for retrenchments and selection criteria for this, training and incentive opportunities and more personal interaction and affirmation from management (Brockner, 1992; Caudron, 1996; Appelbaum & Donia, 2001).

While survivors raised areas of contention relating to South Africa's political past and present, namely, the pace of transformation at Distell and concerns regarding the implementation of affirmative action policy at the company, no concrete suggestions were offered as to how management could address these contentions. While prior research in this field is limited in the South African context, the findings of the current study could not be confirmed or disconfirmed in this regard. While findings in fields other than that of the experiences of retrenchment survivors in this country are congruent with the sentiments of employees in the current study, future research as to the experiences of retrenchment survivors in relation to South African specific issues is desperately needed.

The following chapter documents the limitations of the present study as well as recommendations to the organisation for the mediation of survivor syndrome as well as recommendations for future research in the field.

CHAPTER SIX – LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research focuses on the experiences of survivors following retrenchments at a South African alcohol beverage organisation. While the findings have been analysed, interpreted and discussed in light of prior research and literature in the field, the current research requires such interpretation in view of the limitations that it presents with. With this in mind, the current research has also raised a few distinct areas, which offer potential for future research and investigation such that the experiences of retrenchment survivors, particularly within the South African context may be better understood.

This chapter, therefore, discusses the limitations of the present study and offers recommendations and best practice guidelines for the management of survivor syndrome as well as for future research in this field. The chapter concludes with a summary of points raised in view of these areas.

Limitations of the Study

While the chapter on methodology highlighted a few issues pertaining to the quality of research, a few other limitations require consideration when interpreting the findings that emerged from the present research. These relate to the cross-sectional nature of the study, researcher perceptions when reporting the findings and the nature of the sample.

The Cross-sectional Nature of the Study

A key limitation of the present study is that the data gathering took place over a single point in time, namely mid 2003. While this factor was unavoidable due to the time constraints of this study as well as time constraints facing employees regarding productivity, such factors posed limitations on the study. That the period of data gathering took place approximately a year or two from the time that survivors experienced the threat of job loss (depending on whether they were from the Monis or Greenpark branch) is a factor that might have limited the present study. This is true insofar as employee accounts of experiences may have been somewhat diluted by other experiences, as is natural in the course of time.

While this factor requires consideration in light of the findings obtained, the consistency and rich nature of responses obtained even approximately two years from the time at which survivors experienced the threat of job loss, raises the likelihood that the accuracy of experiences reported are valid.

Reporting the Findings

A feature of qualitative research with a phenomenological underpinning involves understanding participants' lived experiences of the phenomenon under investigation from their perspective.

While the researcher made every effort to stay as close as possible to this lived experience when reporting the findings of this research, the researcher's perceptions are interfaced during the process of analysing and interpreting in a way that determines how this reality is accessed to the reader. In this regard, even though findings were given to the employees for verification, the loss of a certain level of holism and nuances of data is unavoidable through the process of reporting findings. While this issue is commonly raised in the context of qualitative research, it is considered a limitation that forms part and parcel of this type of research.

The Sample

One factor in particular, pertaining to the sample of the current study requires consideration in view of the findings obtained. All fourteen employees were not from one branch of the organisation namely some employees were survivors from the Monis branch and others from the Greenpark branch. As such, while survivors from both branches experienced the threat of job loss, the circumstances under which this threat resumed were different. Such different circumstances may have shaped survivor experiences in different ways.

This may be true insofar as employees from the Monis branch were faced with the reality of the branch closing down and them losing their jobs while survivors from the Greenpark branch did not experience the threat of job loss under this circumstance. Moreover, mostly survivors from the Monis branch experienced dissatisfaction due to the constant comparison of work-life under the old and new organisation, since survivors from both branches had different experiences with regard to their work-lives prior to the retrenchments.

While this factor requires consideration in view of understanding the findings of this study, the general consistency of findings obtained offers a holistic account of the experiences as survivors of a retrenchment process at Distell.

Recommendations

This section offers recommendations to the organisation regarding survivor management as well as recommendations for future research initiatives in this field.

Recommendations and Broad Best Practice Guidelines for the Organisation

The present research has highlighted various factors employed by the organisation that have either worked to promote or mediate negative survivor responses. Based on the experiences of survivors in this study as well as the observations of the researcher, the following recommendations and broad best practice guidelines are offered to the organisation for the management of survivor syndrome. Such guidelines are discussed in light of all stages of the retrenchment process. They include the provision of realistic job and downsizing previews; clear, honest and timely notification and communication throughout the process; the provision of various modes of support throughout the process; the provision of voluntary retrenchment and clear selection criteria and the facilitation of career resilience and employability.

The Provision of Realistic Job and Downsizing Previews

Should the research organisation or any other organisation engage in the recruitment of employees, such employees should be presented with a realistic job preview that includes a candid and realistic discussion concerning employee expectations of employment at the organisation. A core component of this preview should be to furnish employees with honest and up-front information regarding the aggressive and rapidly changing organisational landscape in South Africa and the urgent need for rightsizing, restructuring, downsizing and privatization in response to this change requiring the need for retrenchments.

Such explanations need to be contextualised in light of the country's political past marked by the Apartheid regime and how the needs of the new legislature and policies regarding affirmative action and employment equity impact on the employee at present and in years to come. Realistic job previews of the kind should leave prospective employees with a clear expectation of career resilience and employability as opposed to lifelong employment marked by the traditional psychological contract. Assurance should be offered by management in full support of achieving this objective throughout the employee's tenure at the organisation.

While realistic job previews may be presented to new employees when they enter the organisation, realistic downsizing previews should be presented to those employees who have been employed by the organisation when the retrenchments occur. Such previews should follow a similar strategy focusing on raising employees awareness to the change in psychological contract from the traditional to the contemporary followed by an explanation of this change in view of the socio-political and economic forces impacting on corporate South Africa at any point in time. The corresponding change from lifelong employment with any one company to employability, marketability and career resilience should be a key focus of this preview.

By presenting both previews to the respective employees, namely, new or not, management will immunize employees with a dose of organisational reality that is candid and thereby lowers the likelihood of the immense disappointment and trauma characteristic of negative survivor responses following retrenchments. This promotes the likelihood of symptoms of survivor syndrome being mediated.

The Provision of Clear, Timely and Honest Communication

As the present study has shown, the power of clear, detailed and timely communication that is candid is incontrovertible. As such, should the organisation choose the retrenchment option as a last alternative to the challenges posed by the organisation, employees should be notified and a strategic plan should be underway so as to communicate this information to employees in a transparent, timely, and detailed manner. The content of such communication should include a reiteration of the reasons for the decision and a step-by-step guide detailing the retrenchment process and how this will impact on employees.

The mode of communication should be authentic, creative and clear either through verbal, written, visual or electronic means. Face-to-face communication with a focus on genuinely listening to employee concerns is suggested as a primary mode of communication since concerns and rumors may best be allayed through this means. The multi-cultural nature of South African organisations renders such communication crucial in the management of perceptions of racial inequity and symptoms of survivor syndrome.

The Provision of Material and Moral Support

Being notified of impending retrenchments and possible job loss is an extremely traumatic experience for most employees, leaving them feeling vulnerable and emotionally insecure. If left unattended, such insecurity is the breeding ground for negative survivor responses and symptoms of survivor syndrome. The provision of support in various ways by management is crucial in mediating the likelihood of this response.

As was beneficial in the present study, management may choose to offer such support through the services of an EAP internal or external consultant, hotline counseling services and financial support and advice to the retrenched. While this may serve to support employees materially, management should never forget the power of the provision of moral support throughout the retrenchment process. In a time of great uncertainty and fear, the provision of assurance, affirmation and empathy is invaluable in appeasing employee concerns and mediating negative survivor responses. For such support to be effective, an organisational culture that differs somewhat to the impersonal bureaucratic culture adopted by many organisations is imperative. In view of South Africa's political history, the provision of such support may play a critical role in establishing trust, respect and a sense of solidarity amongst people of various races in the organisational setting.

The provision of material or moral support, therefore, sends a message to employees that management is genuinely cared about their wellbeing and that the decision to retrench was not an easy one for them to make. Such support is important for the mediation of survivor syndrome.

The Provision of Choice and Clear, Consistent Selection Criteria

As was noted by prior research and literature in the field and confirmed by the present study, the provision of choice as in voluntary retrenchment is a preferred alternative to the coercive implications of forced retrenchment and plays a critical role in the mediation of negative survivor responses. Should the organisation choose to retrench employees, the provision of various options such as voluntary retrenchment packages and alternative job postings and positions offers the employee freedom of choice and flexibility as opposed to forced retrenchments which, they may perceive as being given a raw deal.

Should organisations wish to embrace the idea of voluntary retrenchment packages, the clear communication of the retrenchment selection criteria should be a priority as well as the consistent

exercising of such criteria when selecting those that are to remain with the company or not. Both factors facilitate the perception of fairness and equity whilst working to manage the negative symptoms of survivor syndrome.

Facilitating Career Resilience and Employability

Once employees have experienced the threat of job loss, fear of future retrenchments becomes an unavoidable reality that exacerbates symptoms of survivor syndrome. Apart from the aforementioned guidelines, organisations should manage such fear by equipping employees with a change in attitude and perspective that focuses on vigilantly developing their portfolio of skills rather than adopting a dependent stance towards the organisation marked by the perception of lifelong employment.

Line managers, human resource and EAP consultants should facilitate this change in attitude and perspective by collaboratively working with employees in order to regularly assess their interests, strengths and skills as well as offering them access to a comprehensive career resource library for employability. The provision of extrinsic rewards and incentives is recommended since it encourages the renewal of self-confidence and motivation and establishes the feeling of progressing along one's career path rather than being stuck. In light of South Africa's political history, management's facilitation of employees' career resilience and employability fosters a milieu of comradeship and solidarity rather than racial segregation and distance.

By facilitating employees' career resilience and employability, management can replace the passive and dependent stance characteristic of the traditional psychological contract with a proactive, vigilant and adaptable workforce that is responsible for his or her own career growth and employability. This preparation, therefore, mediates the experience of survivor syndrome.

The next section turns to recommendations for future research in the field.

Recommendations for Future Research

A number of areas regarding the experiences of retrenchment survivors as raised by this research requires further investigation. While a number of the findings of the present study are either confirmed or supported by prior research and literature in the field, other findings that were raised could not be confirmed in this manner. In particular, a lack of South African specific research in this field meant that present findings could not be confirmed or disconfirmed by prior research conducted in this area in

the country. The present study has, therefore, functioned as a platform, which may offer insights into the direction with which further research needs to be vested. As such, the following areas require further consideration.

Employees in the present study have raised contentions regarding the pace of transformation in the country as well as specific issues pertaining to the implementation of affirmative action policy. While these contentions were raised in the context of survivors discussing their experiences following the retrenchments, the question of whether or how such contentions relate to symptoms of survivor syndrome has not been established by this study. In view of South Africa's political past of discrimination and inequality, the likelihood of various other issues of contention in the country's present context in any workplace being dyed with the label of racial discrimination, is a reality that can be a tempting port of blame.

Moreover, while research in other areas, namely, regarding employee perceptions of affirmative action and employment equity in this country, have confirmed survivor experiences in the present study, this raises the possibility that such perceptions are an intrinsic part of the experiences of retrenchment survivors in South Africa.

While both alternatives may be true as regards the experiences of retrenchment survivors in this country, further research needs to verify this. Future research therefore needs to establish whether South African specific issues raised by employees in this research are related to the experience of survivor syndrome or not. Should it be established that there exists a relation between the two, further investigations needs to be vested as regards the nature of this relationship. Such findings shall pave the way for devising clearer best practice guidelines regarding the management of survivor syndrome in this country.

Secondly, in light of the unavoidable cross-sectional nature of the present study, future research may be directed towards investigating survivor responses over a period of time, namely, interviewing employees over a few years from the time at which they experienced the threat of job loss. A longitudinal study of this nature will allow the researcher the opportunity to investigate the types of survivor responses experienced at different points in time as well as the influence of such responses on work attitudes and behaviours. The researcher could, for example, investigate, monitor and record

levels of job insecurity over this time and whether they continue to motivate survivors to work harder in view of the fear of future retrenchments.

Thirdly, while the Western Cape has a higher coloured rather than black population, one may consider carrying out such a study in various provinces and organisations in South Africa so as to assess the applicability of such findings to other cases. This may include an investigation as to whether the same South African specific issues are raised by different races in different organisational and provincial contexts, thus testing the theoretical coherence of the present findings. Future research is therefore warranted in this regard.

Finally, while cognitive-affective behavioural theory offers important insights as to how survivor responses may impact on employee behaviours, further research needs point in the direction of understanding the specific relationship between survivor responses and work attitudes in the context of retrenchments. Research that helps to unpack this relationship will be beneficial to organisations insofar as managing the impact of survivor responses at work.

Summary

This chapter has identified the limitations posed by the present study. These relate specifically to the cross-sectional nature of the research, issues pertaining to the reporting of findings as well as the sample.

Recommendations and broad best practice guidelines relating to the mediation of survivor syndrome have also been offered to the organisation. These include the provision of realistic job and downsizing previews; clear, honest and timely notification and communication throughout the process; the provision of various modes of support throughout the process; the provision of voluntary retrenchment and clear selection criteria and the facilitation of career resilience and employability.

The chapter concludes with potential areas of future research that have been made apparent by the current research. The need for South African specific research on the nature of survivor experiences in the context of retrenchments is highlighted as a key factor. Other potential areas for research include a longitudinal investigation of retrenchment survivor experiences over a period of time, researching such experiences in different provinces and organisations in the country as well as further investigations into the relationship between survivor responses and their work attitude.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to investigate, through a case study approach, the experiences of retrenchment survivors in a South African alcoholic beverage organisation. The researcher attempted to achieve this objective through an in-depth qualitative investigation, which researched the subjective reality and experiences of survivors following retrenchments at the organisation.

The motive for conducting research of this nature was to gain insight into the experiences of retrenchment survivors in this country since prior research in this area is limited in South Africa. The findings of this research not only offer important insights to the organisation in view of the management of retrenchment survivors and survivor syndrome, but also highlight critical issues pertaining to the political past and present of this country, which require serious consideration for such management in this context.

Ultimately, it is the survivors of a retrenchment drive who function as the linchpins of future profitability. As such, their psychological wellbeing as well as the impact of this on the bottom-line objectives of any organisation, are important and become crucial in light of the social, political and economic nuances posed by South Africa.

The findings of this study have raised themes that have either been confirmed or disconfirmed by prior research and literature in the field. New insights have been gained insofar as the interface of South African specific issues and the symptoms of survivor syndrome as experienced by survivors following the retrenchment process at the organisation. The study therefore revealed that in addition to key experiences documented by prior research and literature in the field, South African survivors of retrenchment are faced with other contentions that are located within the country's history of racial discrimination.

Managing survivor syndrome in this context therefore becomes complex and involves a refined sensitivity of racial issues to be factored into such a model of management. A denial of such issues in this country may only serve to exacerbate the experience of survivor syndrome further, thus mitigating against any other conditions taken to address this experience. Human resource practitioners and line managers in organisations have a responsibility not only to offer survivors honest, transparent and timely information regarding the reasons for and procedures for retrenchment, but also to openly discuss the pace of transformation and steps taken to reverse past injustices experienced in this

country. In this regard, despite the discussion of racial equity and inequity being a sensitive one in South Africa, it is crucial for managers to open the floor to candid discussions as to how the pace and nature of change influences the experiences of retrenchment survivors.

Such candid discussion ushers transparency in this regard and may play a critical role in shaping the actual and perceived reality for survivors. In this manner, assumptions and speculations concerning any aspect of the retrenchment process and its relation to racial equity or inequity, may be openly aired and tested through such discussions with management instead of functioning as a forbidden topic.

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APPENDIX A
CONFIRMATION OF INTERVIEW

Dear Participant

I am a Masters student in Industrial Psychology at the University of Cape Town. I am conducting research as part of the requirements of the Masters program and am very interested in understanding the experiences of survivors following a retrenchment process.

Retrenchments have taken place at both the Monis and Greenpark branch of Distell. The employees that were chosen to remain with the company are referred to as the survivors of the retrenchment process. I understand that you are either a survivor from the Monis or Greenpark branch at Distell. I am therefore very interested in understanding your experiences as survivors of these retrenchment processes.

Should you choose to participate in my research, please be assured that issues pertaining to confidentiality and anonymity will be strictly considered. In this regard, individual interviews will take place for the duration of approximately sixty minutes and will be tape recorded with your consent.

I thank you for your support and assistance and look forward to meeting you.

Regards

Varsha Morar

APPENDIX B
SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. When did you find out that there might be retrenchments?
2. What were you told about the retrenchments?
3. Did management explain to you why there might be retrenchments? If so, what reasons did they offer?
4. Did you feel that you had enough information about the impending retrenchments?
5. How did you feel when you were told about the retrenchments?
6. How did this news affect your attitudes and behaviours at work?
7. How did you cope when you heard about the retrenchments?
8. Were there any support systems provided to help you to cope with this knowledge?
9. In general, did you feel that the retrenchment process was fair or unfair? Explain further.
10. What were the rumors at the time?
11. When did you know that you still had a job?
12. How did management communicate this knowledge to you?
13. What did it feel like to know that you still had a job?
14. What were your attitudes and behaviours towards your work when you realized that you still had a job?
15. In what ways did management support you thereafter?
16. How are you feeling in the organisation now?
17. How do you perceive management in your current work-life?